

THE
GRAND INQUIRY,

Am I in CHRIST or not?

EXPLAINED and RECOMMENDED,

In Order to help *any Man* to know the
STATE of his own SOUL.

With some PREFATORY HINTS, for promoting a more
general ATTENTION to such SELF-INQUIRY.

By BENJAMIN FAWCETT. M.A.

*If thou take forth the Precious from the Vile, thou shalt
be as my Mouth. Jer. xv. 19.*

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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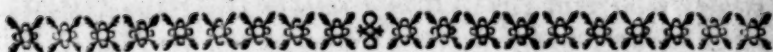
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P R E F A C E.

HO' the professed Followers of *Jesus* be ever so much divided, and subdivided, by Modes and Forms, by Notions and Speculations in Religion, it is nevertheless delightful to contemplate their Union in their common *Christianity*. But when Charity has thus exerted all its healing Power and Influence, in Order to produce Harmony out of Confusion, and turn Deformity into Beauty; yet even *Charity* itself must submit to the evident Dictates of *Truth*, and still suffer one Distinction to remain. *For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel*: Neither are they all *Christians* in Reality, who wear that lovely Name. *Saints* and *Sinners* will distinguish the whole *Christian* World, till the Period of this State of Trial shall make a distant and everlasting Separation. Oh Eternity! Eternity!—

And are *Christians*, thro' every Age, to be thus distinguished from each other? Will there ever be in the Church upon Earth, both *almost*, and *altogether Christians*? Will the *Form of Godliness* always differ from the *Power*; and they, who merely name the Name of *Christ*, from those who actually depart from all *Iniquity*? Will the Time be never known, on this Side the *Judgment-Day*, when *Christianity* in Name, and in *Truth*, shall be inseparably united in every Professor? The Thought is very affecting! It should excite us to serious *Self-Inquiry*. Perhaps, we have, even this Moment, only a Name to live, while we are dead. And perhaps, after all the shining Honours of our

Christian Profession, we shall at last appear among the many, who will say to *Christ* in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name have cast out Devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful Works! Unto whom he will then profess, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work Iniquity. For God's Sake, and in Pity to our own Souls, let us be persuaded to act the safe, the prudent Part, and examine ourselves, and prove our own selves, and know our own selves, whether we be in *Christ*, or not.

Even supposing our State and Condition for Eternity to be good, Nothing is more desirable than to know that it is so. We cannot be happy at present, without knowing it. And our Happiness must bear a due Proportion to the rational and scriptural Foundation on which our Knowledge of it is built. An imaginary Happiness may very soon prove real Misery. Therefore serious *Self-Inquiry* is upon all Principles, worthy the Man and the Christian. Never does the Merchant reflect with so much Pleasure upon his secular Affairs, as when he has just finished an exact Balance of his Accounts, and found his Substance, in Fact, not diminished, but improved. Nor can the Christian ever take a more effectual Step, that his Joy may be full, than, with jealous Eye, to review what he has been doing in a divine Life, how he has negotiated his great Affairs for Eternity, and whether he finds in himself the genuine Characteristics of an Heir of God, and a Joint-Heir with *Christ*.

Wherever Religion flourishes, *Self-Inquiry* is one principal Means of its Beginning and Progress. The Faith and Piety of the Jailor at *Philippi* began with earnestly asking, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And when Thousands of guilty Jews at *Jerusalem* were, in one Day, brought to the Obedience of Faith; their divine Change first discovered itself by that inexpressible Concern of Mind with which they said, Men and Brethren, what shall we do? Were we to consult the universal History of the Church, thro' succeeding

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ceeding Ages, it would appear beyond all Contradiction, that, whenever religious *Self-Inquiry* was superseded by Negligence and Formality, or by the Animosities of Contention and Debate, real Religion proportionably suffered; but, when *Self-Inquiry* revived, real Religion always revived with it.

It will, I hope, be universally allowed, that *the Beauty of Holiness* is never so eminently seen in the *House of God*, as when its sacred Offices of public Prayer, Preaching, and Administrations of Sacraments, not only have, thro' the Skill and Faithfulness of Ministers, a natural Tendency to excite every Worshipper to serious *Self-Inquiry*; but when, by a divine Blessing, they are made effectual to this important End. To see such Glory as this, is, in the Estimation of all pious Ministers, like the Joy of Harvest. And if, in this Respect, my reverend Fathers and Brethren of whatsoever Denomination, have been signally owned and honoured of God, as I am verily persuaded some of them have, *I therein do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.* I desire, with all my Heart, more particularly to bless God for that Spirit of Piety and Zeal, which Numbers of the Clergy of the established Church are now exerting, in their respective Parishes, in Order to awaken the Souls around them out of a State of spiritual Security and Insensibility, and possess them with the most serious Attention to eternal Concerns. To hear that many of their Parishioners are asking the Way to the Heavenly Zion, with their Faces thitherward, is a convincing Evidence that God is graciously smiling on their faithful Labours. And it happily intimates, that our Candlestick shall not yet be removed out of its Place; though on many other Accounts, there is so much Reason to fear it. Indeed, such Labourers as these are the Chariots and Horsemen, the Armies and Natives, of our British Israel.

This Revival of a Spirit of Piety and Zeal among Ministers will, I trust, do more, towards the reviving the Pastoral Inspection of all the Souls belonging to their

respective Parishes or Congregations than any Thing that has been ever so earnestly, or judiciously wrote, in Favour of that too much neglected, but most important Part of the *sacred Office*. The great *Apostle* could not have took such a chearful Farewell of those, among whom he had gone preaching the Kingdom of God, and who, he certainly knew, should see his Face no more, if, in these tender Circumstances, he could not, with holy Confidence, have told them, *I have taught you publicly, and from House to House*. And was every Minister to go, as often as he can, at least once a Year, thro' the several Families belonging to his Parish, or Congregation, merely to inquire into, and assist them in their spiritual Concerns; this, it is believed, would promote a more general Attention to religious Self-Inquiry, than the most regular Performance of all other Ministerial Duties, abstracted from it. Our Addresses from the Pulpit are like Arrows shot at a Venture; but in Families we directly level at the proper Mark. In going from House to House, we shall often make those Discoveries of the Success of our public Labours, which might otherwise have never been known to us in the present World; and thus we shall seize the most desirable Opportunities of confirming many serious Impressions, or reviving them before they are quite dead. Thus we may demonstrate, how much we are in earnest for the Welfare of Souls, and be the happy Instruments of leading many to Closet, Family, and public Worship, who have been living all their Lives without God in the World. It is, indeed, a Work of Self-Denial, and needs much Conquest over our corrupt Inclinations; but it is no more, than is necessary to prove ourselves the faithful Servants of Jesus Christ. But whatever Reluctance we may feel at our Entrance on this great and good Work, we shall certainly find, that the prudent, faithful and vigorous Prosecution of it will leave a Joy behind it, infinitely more valuable than any Reflection upon the Hours spent in the most gay, or the most learned Enter-

tertainments. Bishop *Barnet*, in his *Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, represents this particular Branch of it, "as indeed, the Foundation upon which all the other Parts of the *Pastoral Care* may be well managed." Dr. *John Edwards* begins his Book called *The Peacher* with "granting, that there are other Parts of the *Pastoral Office*, and those of great Importance, besides *Preaching*.—We must (says he) enquire and endeavour to discover, by private Conference, what is the particular Condition of every Member of our Flock, with Respect to Religion, and the Welfare of their Souls. We are to advise, counsel, and admonish them in their own *Habitations*, as well as in the *Church*. We have our Blessed Saviour for our Pattern in this Matter; we have read in the Evangelical Records, that besides his public Discourses and Sermons, he made frequent Visits, and gave private Advice and Counsel. And we read, that the Apostles taught the People publicly, and from House to House. And our Church approves of this in her *Form of the Ordination of Priests*, where she requires of those that take that sacred Office on them, and have the Charge of Souls, to use private (as well as public) Admonitions and Exhortations, as Need requires, and Occasion shall be given." Dr. *Leechman*, in his *Sermon on the Temper, Character, and Duty of a Minister of the Gospel*, says, "the Employment of composing Differences, or extinguishing Animosities, searching-out modest and indigent Merit and relieving it, comforting a melancholy Heart, giving Counsel to a perplexed Mind, suspending Pain by our Sympathy and Presence, tho' it were but for a Moment, suggesting to an unfurnished Mind proper Materials for Meditation in the Time of Distress, or laying hold of a favourable Opportunity of conveying valuable Instructions, and religious Impressions, to a Mind little susceptible of them on other Occasions; there is no Need of saying any Thing

“ in Confirmation of this: It was the glorious Character of *Jesus*, that *He went about doing Good.*”
 Dr. Doddridge, in his *Sermon on the Evil and Danger of neglecting Souls*, observes, “ the Learned, the Wise, the Virtuous, the Pious Minister, is, I fear, often negligent of a considerable Part of his Trust and Charge.—The diligent Inspection of the Flock, Pastoral Visits, the Observation of the religious State of Families, personal Exhortations, Admonitions and Cautions, by Word or Letter, as Prudence shall direct, the Catechising Children, the Promoting Religious Associations among the younger and the elder People of our Charge, and the strict and resolute Exercise of Discipline in the several Churches over which we preside; are these no Parts of our Office? Will we say it with our dying Breath, will we maintain it before the Tribunal of *Christ*, that they did not belong to the *Christian Ministry*? And if not, will our Care in other Parts of it be allowed as a sufficient Excuse before him, for our total Omission of these?” Mr. Baxter, in his *Gildas Salvianus, or the Reformed Pastor*, says, “ one Word of seasonable Advice given by a Minister to Persons in Necessity, has done that Good, which many Sermons would not have done.—When I look before me, and consider what, through the Blessing of God, this Work well managed is like to produce, it makes my Heart leap for Joy. Truly, Brethren, [and God grant this may be more abundantly applicable to all the reverend Brethren in this present Day, than it ever was in 1655!] you have begun a most blessed Work, such as your own Consciences may rejoice in, your Parishes rejoice in, and the Nation rejoice in, and the Child that is yet unborn; yea, Thousands and Millions, for ought we know, may have Cause to bless God for, when we have finished our Course.”

But we are not to imagine, that the promoting religious *Self Inquiry* in precious immortal Souls is to be

be absolutely confined to the *Sacred Office* of the *Christian Ministry*. Every *Rank*, and *Relation* of Human Life may contribute something, that is valuable, towards the benevolent and most important Design. *What knowest thou, O Wife, says the Apostle, whether thou shalt save thy Husband? Or how knowest thou, O Man, whether thou shalt save thy Wife?* His suggesting this to the *Conjugal Relation*, makes it no way improper to add, "how knowest thou, O Parent, or " *Master and Mistress, or Brother and Sister, or Friend* " and *Neighbour*, whether thou shalt save thy *Children, or Servants, or Brethren, and Sisters, or any* " other *Friends* and intimate Acquaintance?" It is an universal Duty, to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-Day; lest any of us be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin. As we would abhor the Temper and Character of murderous Cain, we should never say, as he did, *Am I my Brother's Keeper?* By a Word spoken in due Season, only in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, and without the least Appearance of invading the *Ministerial Office*, it has often happened; that thoughtless Souls have been led to serious Consideration, and *Self-Inquiry*, so as to secure to themselves eternal Life. And what has been done, may be done again, and should be attempted by all the Lovers of Souls, in a humble Dependance upon his Grace, who died for them, and rose again.

Besides these private and personal Efforts, there are others of a public and social Nature, by which both *Clergy* and *Laity* may concur together, for promoting a more general Spread of religious *Self-Inquiry*. Instances of this Kind have been in every Age: And, bad as the present Age may be in other Respects, I am far from thinking, that in this, we can justly say, *the former Days were better than these*. The present Century began with the numerous and ever memorable *Societies for Reformation of Manners*, thro' Great Britain and Ireland, which were well known to have been chiefly contrived, and supported, by the happy

Union of the pious and public-spirited both among *Clergy* and *Laity*. About the same Time, and with the same united Spirit, were also formed, in *England* and *Scotland*, the *Societies for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts*. Not to mention what has also been done, within the same Period, and of the same Nature and Tendency, by our *Fellow-Protestants* in other Parts of *Europe*. By a divine Blessing on these vigorous and well-concerted Measures, there is Reason to hope, that a Concern for serious Piety was not only revived and spread in *these Nations*, and other Parts of the *Protestant World*; but also that considerable Numbers of the *Heathen* and *Mahometan Natives* of *Asia*, *Africa*, and *America*, have embraced the Gospel under all the peculiar Advantages of a *Protestant Profession*. This appears, by the Success which has attended the *Protestant Missionaries*, both in the *East* and *West-Indies*; together with what is lately begun among those unhappy *African Negroes*, who are *Slaves* in many of our *American Colonies*, but especially in *Virginia*, where many of them are gladly receiving the Gospel, under the *stated Ministrations* in the Neighbourhoods in which their *Masters* reside. These happy Events, taken in their due Connection, seem to distinguish the *present Century* from all former Centuries, as the *only one*, in which serious Piety has been making some considerable Advances among many of the *Natives* of every Quarter of the *Globe*. All these, we hope, are only the Dawnings of a more illustrious Day.

Scarcely any one of the *Societies*, now referred to, has a more direct Tendency, in Proportion to its Extent, to revive, or to spread religious *Self-Inquiry*, than that which calls itself, *The Society for Promoting religious Knowledge among the Poor*. This was begun in *London*, *August*, 1750. Its numerous Members, who are principally of the *Laity*, and indeed of different religious Persuasions, are nevertheless well united in the Choice of the most *practical Books* in *Divinity*, and in bestowing them upon any *necessitous Objects*

jects that are recommended to their Charity, without regarding any other Distinction. *God* grant, that the Accounts, which this *Society* appears to have received already, from various and remote Parts of these *Islands*, as well as from our remoter *American Colonies*, may only prove an Earnest of yet more numerous and more delightful Accounts, which shall be communicated to them! *

But to crown all these Endeavours, both of *Clergy* and *Laity*, towards spreading thro' our dear *native Land*, and thro' the *whole Earth*, a serious Concern for eternal Things in every human Breast, we cannot wish to have any Thing added so important in every View, as *a Spirit of Prayer for the further Coming of the Kingdom of God*. Certainly that above all other Expedients, would have the most encouraging Aspect, both upon our own Age, and upon the Ages to come. Without *Prayer*, the best concerted Schemes are very defective, and the most vigorous Efforts are neither rightly prepared for Success or Disappointment. Nothing is more reasonable, than to *acknowledge God*, by *Prayer*, in all our Ways. And it should be considered, that there is peculiar Need for the *Acknowledgment*, when our Attempts more immediately relate to the Kingdom of God in our World, and consequently to an Interest, which is sure to be opposed by whole *Legions*, not only of evil Spirits, but of those perverse Passions and Prejudices, which govern the Views of most Men, and from which we dare not say our own Hearts are perfectly free. Though it must be allowed, that to *pray* for the Progress and Success of the Gospel, in the Conviction and Conversion of Sinners, and in the Edification of Saints, is equally the Duty of all Persons and Times; yet it is also manifest, that when *God prepares the Heart* of his People to *pray*, it is a Token for good, that *he will cause his Ear to hear*.

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* A *Society* of the same Nature, and with much the same Rules, was begun at *Edinburgh*, February, 1756. Another at *Glasgow*, October, 1756. [vid. *Gillies's Appendix to his Historical Collections* No. 1.]

If Zion's Friends will not for Zion's Sake hold their Peace, and for Jerusalem's Sake will not rest, there is Reason to hope, the Righteousness thereof is about to go forth as Brightness, and the Salvation thereof as a Lamp that burneth; and that e'er long God will establish, and will make Jerusalem a Praise in the Earth. If the Lord Jesus Christ peculiarly encourages the united Prayers of his People, by promising, that if but two of them shall agree on Earth, as touching any Thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by his Father which is in Heaven; then, surely, we may conclude the Promise shall not fail, when Multitudes of praying Souls, in different Nations, and in different Quarters of the Globe, of different religious Persuasions, and Forms of Worship, shall animate each other's Faith and Ferour, by explicitly agreeing together, both as to the important Matter, and as to the solemn Season of Prayer. And, blessed be God, this is not a Thing that exists only in Idea, but, even in this degenerate Day, has some glorious Reality.

The first printed Agreement of this Sort, that ever I met with, was published by Dr. Doddridge, February, 1741-2, in a Copy of an Association at Northampton, for propagating the Kingdom of Christ in the World, placed in the Margin of the Dedication of his Sermon on the Evil and Danger of neglecting Souls. Page viii. The Articles of that Society, so far as they relate to Prayer, were these. " 1. That we purpose, as God
 " shall enable us, to be daily putting-up some earnest
 " Petitions to the Throne of Grace, for the Advance-
 " ment of the Gospel in the World, and for the Success
 " of all the faithful Servants of Christ, who are en-
 " gaged in the Work of it, especially among the
 " Heathen Nations.—2. That we will assemble at least
 " Four Times a Year, in our Place of public Wor-
 " ship, at such Seasons as shall by mutual Consent
 " be appointed, to spend some Time in solemn Prayer
 " together on this important Account.—3. We do
 " hereby express our Desire, that some Time may be
 " then

“ then spent, if God give an Opportunity, in reviewing those Promises of Scripture, which relate to the Establishment of our Redeemer’s Kingdom in the World; that our Faith may be supported, and our Prayers quickened, by the Contemplation of them.”

The next was a printed Memorial from several Ministers in Scotland to their Brethren in different Places for continuing a Concert for Prayer, first entered into in the Year 1744. This is to be seen in Vol. II. Page 399—402, of a Work intituled, *Historical Collections relating to remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, and eminent Instruments employed in promoting it*; compiled by the Rev. Mr. John Gillies, one of the Ministers of Glasgow. Printed by Foulis, 1754. The Memorial informs us, that the Concert was first began, with an immediate and special Regard to the Coming of the Kingdom of God, and the Success of the Gospel of Christ in our World, by some Ministers and others in Scotland 1744, and was then extended only to two Years: But at the earnest Desire of several Ministers and others in America, it was renewed in 1746, and agreed upon for the seven following Years: We are also told, after the Copy of the Memorial, that the Time agreed on for the Continuance of the Concert being elapsed, it was farther proposed and agreed, by several Ministers and Societies in Scotland, to continue it for seven Years more; that is, from June 3d, 1754. To this last Agreement is added a general Invitation and Intreaty, that all, into whose Hands it may come, would join in so happy an Expedient for promoting the Kingdom of God, and the Success of the Gospel of Christ in our World. The Articles of this Concert for Prayer seem to be an Improvement upon those published by Dr. Doddridge; particularly, in determining, that some Part of every Saturday Evening, and every Lord’s-Day-Morning, should be more privately devoted to the Purposes of the Concert; and that the same should be made a public Exercise, once every Quarter of a Year; namely, on the first Tuesdays in the

the Months of February, May, August and November; or, at least, on such other Days, nigh to these, as should be found most agreeable to the State and Circumstances of particular Societies and Congregations. It is also expressly provided, in the Memorial, that these particular Determinations be considered as Friendly Resolutions, which may be altered by each Person, or Society, at Discretion, and be adapted to all the various Circumstances of different People, Times, and Places, so as perfectly to consist with the most extensive Christian Liberty. In the Pages now referred to in the Historical Collections, we have an Account of the great Progress this Concert has made in New-England, and other Parts of the British Colonies in America, where many Ministers, private Christians, yea, Congregations and Churches, have entered into it, and continue to enter. In one of the Letters from thence, a Minister writes, May 23d, 1749. "It is Matter of great Thankfullness and Joy, that " God puts it into the Hearts of so many in various " Parts, to unite in extraordinary Prayer for the Coming " of Christ's Kingdom: And surely it bodes well. It " would tend to cause this Concert to prevail much " more here, if we could hear that it was greatly " spreading and prevailing on your Side the Atlantic " Ocean, where it was first begun, and from whence " it was proposed to us." With an immediate Reference to the Concert for Prayer, it appears that the Rev. Mess. Sewall, Prince, Webb, Foxcroft, and Gee, Pastors in Boston, publicly declare, " And this Design we cannot but recommend to all, who desire " the Coming of that blissfull Kingdom, in its promised Extent and Glory, in this wretched World." Though the above Agreements relating to Prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God, and the Success of the Gospel of Christ in our World, are the only Instances of the Kind, that I have ever seen in Print; yet I doubt not there have been many, of the same Nature and Tendency, which have never been made known.

known beyond the particular Neighbourhoods where they were transacted, or the little Circle of Persons immediately concerned in them; and perhaps merely depending on *Verbal Promises* and an *Union of Hearts*, without ever committing any Particulars to *Writing*. One such Instance, I have the Pleasure to observe, is yet remaining among my *Kidderminster-Friends*, who, with a distinct and immediate View to the *Interest of Christ*, and the *Spread of his Gospel through the Earth*, have privately met together, once every Month, and spent about *two Hours* in *Prayer*; and this Practice they have continued between *Twenty* and *Thirty Years*, which is more than double the Time since my first coming to this Place. Some of them remember, how my worthy Predecessors encouraged, and their pious *Fore-Fathers* were engaged in, the same Design; which, in Connection with more important Motives, would have its proper Weight with them to maintain the Practice.

On the whole, there is Nothing I would more earnestly intreat of my *Readers*, next to the securing their own Personal Interest in *Christ*, than their heartily joining in such benevolent Prayers for the more glorious *Coming of his Kingdom* among all Men. And perhaps some may be the rather induced to engage in this good Work, by considering, that though Providence may have rendered them incapable of contributing towards most other *Schemes* and *Efforts* for promoting the Success of the Gospel, and the Spread of religious *Self-Inquiry*; yet they can have no just Objection to this of *Prayer*, which lies as open to the *Poor*, as to the *Rich*, and may be practised by Persons in the *greatest Obscurity*, as well as by those in the most eminent Stations. Certainly the *Poor of this World* may be *Rich in Faith*, and therefore *Rich in Prayer*; so that even their Power and Interest at the Throne of Grace, may, according to the infallible Estimation of Heaven, be equal to that of *Princes*, who *wrestle with God and prevail*. Thus, by their Prayers,
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it may be easy for *their deep Poverty* to abound unto the *Riches of their Liberality* towards Millions of their much more impoverished *Fellow-Men*.—But, it is more especially desirable, for giving the widest Spread to this pious, rational, and scriptural Scheme for Prayer, that God would graciously incline the Hearts of *Ministers* of all different Denominations, to exert themselves to the utmost, in Order to carry it into Execution, wherever their Influence extends. And as soon as *Zion* shall, in this Sense, *travail*, we are then taught by divine Promises to infer, that *she shall bring forth her Children, she shall break forth on the right Hand, and on the left, and her Seed shall inherit the Heathen Land, and make the desolate Cities to be inhabited.*

With Respect to the *following Sermons*, I have only this to add, that a divine Blessing has *already* attended them, from the Pulpit, with Efficacy to some Souls, both for beginning a divine Life, where it was wanting, and for improving it, where it was begun; it is therefore my chearfull Hope, that the compassionate Redeemer will not now despise such a *Mite*, which, in this more public Manner, is *cast into his sacred Treasury.*

B. FAWCETT.

Kidderminster,
Dec. 4. 1755.



S E P.



S E R M O N I.

T H E

G R A N D I N Q U I R Y, &c.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 17. first Part.

Therefore if any Man be in Christ —

AMONG the various Professors of Christianity nothing is more generally acknowledged than the high Importance of having a clear and undoubted Title to the Christian Character. If we apprehend our Neighbour's Title unexceptionably good, we silently congratulate his Happiness: If we deliberately judge, that this is our own Case, we are presently conscious of some Degree of that *Peace of God which passeth all Understanding*. On the other Hand, if we are obliged to look on any around us, however fond of their Christian Name, as having no Title to the *Thing* itself,

self, which that lovely *Name* imports, their Mistake is the Object of our Pity, and we secretly wish to have their Error seasonably corrected; and all its tremendous Consequences effectually prevented. But if ever we entertain such dismal Thoughts of our own State and Character, we are unavoidably frightened at ourselves, feel an inward Torment which we cannot sufficiently express, and perhaps conclude ourselves of *all Men the most miserable*.

It may happen the Judgment we form of our own religious State, whether a peaceful or tormenting one, may be equally unsupported by Truth; and neither the one, nor the other, have any Existence but in our Imagination. Probably there are Multitudes, who glory in their Christianity, but without the least Appearance of the Christian Temper; who hope for Salvation by *Christ*, but their *Hope* is that of the *Hypocrite* which *shall perish*. Nor is it less probable, that amongst the serious and devout there are not a few, whose Piety wears a very discouraging Aspect, and who are numbering themselves amongst Hypocrites and Unbelievers.

These mistaken Apprehensions can only be rectified by a due Attention to the *Sacred Volume*. This only is the *Light of our Feet, and the Lamp of our Paths*, safely to lead us out of the Labyrinth of our own perplexed Thoughts and Reasonings. The Passages of Scripture, which have this happy Tendency, are innumerable; among which the Words of the Text are not the least distinguishing.

It seems the Church at *Corinth* was not without a Mixture of *nominal* and *real* Christians. Though the Apostle chiefly addresses himself to the latter, yet he was unavoidably led to speak of the former, as Persons *which gloried in Appearance and not in Heart* (a); who were *false Apostles, deceitful Workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ* (b). No Wonder such Persons looked upon *Paul* with Envy, and

(a) 2 Cor. v. 12.

(b) 2 Cor. xi. 13.

and upon all the Transports of his holy Zeal as the mere Effects of Madnefs. That these were their Thoughts of him, appears by the Manner in which he vindicates himself: *Whether we be besides ourselves, says he, it is to God; or whether we be sober it is for your Cause. For the Love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no Man after the Flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the Flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more* (c). After this complete Vindication, the Apostle proceeds, in the Words of the Text, and those which immediately follow, to an Inference which equally concerns both *nominal* and *real* Christians; which effectually *takes forth the precious from the vile*, and plainly teaches every Man, how to ascertain the Validity, or Insufficiency of his Title to the Christian Character. *Therefore if any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature: Old Things are past away; behold, all Things are become new.* Here is a Case proposed, in which every Man is interested, who makes any Profession of Christianity; and a *Rule of Judgment* laid down, by which every Professor may try himself with all desirable Perspicuity and Precision. The Proposal is so interesting, the Rule of Judgment is so satisfactory, that one is ready to conclude, that every Hearer will anticipate the Design of this Discourse, by an immediate and particular Application, *Am I in Christ?* Nothing is more desirable than to cherish a Disposition to such an Inquiry: Nor can any Thing be more suitable to the Apostle's Design. Therefore to encourage every Hearer to the personal Inquiry, and at the same Time to illustrate the Meaning of the Text, let us confine our Thoughts to the following

Observation.

(c) 2 Cor. v. 13—16.

The grand Inquiry

Observation. *Am I in Christ or not? Is an Inquiry, which may help any Man to know the State of his own Soul.*

- I. It will be proper to explain the Inquiry, what it is for *any Man to be in Christ*.
- II. To prove that *any Man* may know whether he has an Interest *in Christ*, or not.
- III. To point out some of the Reasons, why many Persons never know whether they have an Interest *in Christ*, or not.
- IV. To urge all to make this grand Inquiry, who have hitherto neglected it.

First, It is of no little Importance to explain the full Meaning and genuine Import of the Inquiry, what it is for any Man to be in Christ.

To be in Christ, "is to have a Personal Interest " in the Blessings of eternal Salvation, which Christ " has promised to all them, and them only, that obey " him (d)."—In this Sense the Phrase frequently occurs. Particularly, when Paul says of himself, I have suffered the Loss of all Things, and do count them but Dung that I may win Christ; and be found in " him (e)," His Loss of all Things, in the present World, could only be counterbalanced by his Gain of eternal Blessings in Christ. Nor can he mean any Thing less than this, when he says of others, there is therefore now no Condemnation to them which are " in Christ Jesus," who walk not after the Flesh but after the Spirit (f); that is, they, and only they, who obey Christ by a holy Walk, have a clear Title to final Acceptance and complete Salvation by him. Elsewhere the Apostle more distinctly enumerates those
Blessings

(d) Heb. v. 9.

(e) Phil. iii. 8, 9.

(f) Rom. viii. 1.

Blessings which the Saints receive from *Christ*, and which they receive as the Gift of God; of whom are ye "*in Christ Jesus*," who of God is made unto us *Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification and Redemption* (g). To be in *Christ* must therefore include the whole distinguishing *Character* and *Happiness* of a true Christian. This is farther confirmed by the Clause which immediately follows the Text, when considered in its proper Connection with it: *If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature*. If being a new Creature was not essential, both to the Character and Happiness of a true Christian, or, in the Language of the Text, to a *Man's being in Christ*, our blessed Lord would not have so solemnly declared, *verily, verily I say unto you, except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God* (h).

And is it the whole of a true Christian to be in *Christ*? Surely if any Thing can render the Expression yet more important, it must be the Manner in which it is used in the Text; where, under the insinuating Form of a Supposition, the Apostle most inoffensively excites every Man to apply the grand Inquiry to himself. "Come then, O my Soul!" let each of us be saying to ourselves, "improve the salutary Hint; enter the Fields of Self-Inquiry; penetrate the deepest Recesses of a treacherous Heart, and try what Concern thou hast in the Powers, Principles and Pleasures of a Life peculiar to the true Christian. Does the great Apostle suggest, for universal Advantage—if any Man be in *Christ*? —Nothing can be more rational in itself, more subservient, O my Soul! to thine eternal Interest, or more consistent with the Apostle's Meaning, than to ask thyself, *am I in Christ*?"

"Is my Character that of a true Christian? Am I dissatisfied with the mere *Name*, unless I have also the *Thing*? Do I renounce all undue Dependence on my best Performances, or inward Dispositions, abhorring

(g) 1 Cor. i. 30.

(h) John iii. 3.

“ abhorring the Thought of making a Saviour of
 “ any Duties done by me, or of any Virtues, or
 “ Graces wrought in me? Whilst I profess to depend
 “ upon *Christ* alone for Salvation, and am solicitous
 “ to know, and, when known, to find in myself,
 “ the genuine Evidences of an Interest in *Christ*?
 “ Do I esteem the most zealous Attachment to any
 “ Party of Christians, to any *Form of Worship*, or
 “ to any *Scheme of Doctrine*, abstracted from *Holiness*
 “ of Heart and Life to be an insufficient Evidence of
 “ an Interest in *Christ*? Is the Word of God the
 “ only *Standard* by which I measure the Size of my
 “ Christian Character, the only *Touchstone* by which I
 “ try its Sincerity, and the only *Rule* to which I re-
 “ duce its Virtues and Graces? Have I, according
 “ to that Holy Word, been *convinced of Sin* (i)?
 “ Have I had such a Sense of my Sins, both of Heart
 “ and Life, of their abominable Pollution, of their
 “ dreadful Guilt, and the everlasting Condemnation
 “ and Ruin, to which they expose me, as to be weary
 “ of my State and Condition, and even to *labour*,
 “ *and be heavy laden*, like one that is pressed down
 “ under an insupportable Burthen; And, despairing
 “ of Help and Ease any other Way, have I ever
 “ *came to Christ to find Rest* unto my Soul (k)? Was I
 “ firmly persuaded, that *Christ is able, and willing*,
 “ *to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by*
 “ *him* (l)? Did I cordially approve, and gratefully
 “ rejoice in, the appointed Way of Salvation by
 “ *Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord*
 “ *Jesus Christ* (m)? Is mine a *Repentance unto Life*
 “ (n); a *Turning from Dead Works, to serve the*
 “ *living God*? Is it sincere, universal and persever-
 “ ing, even a *Repentance to Salvation not to be re-*
 “ *pented of* (o)? Will my Faith in *Christ* stand the
 “ Trial? Is its Nature and are its Fruits divine?
 “ Does

(i) John xiv. 8.

(l) John vi. 37. Heb. vii. 27. compared.

(n) Acts xi. 28.

(k) Mat. xi. 28, 29.

(m) Acts xx. 21.

(o) 2 Cor. vii. 10.

“ Does it, like *the Centurion's Faith*, lay me low in
 “ the most affecting Sense of my own *Unworthiness*
 “ of *Christ's* Regard, at the same Time that it fills me
 “ with the most adoring Confidence in him, as an all-
 “ sufficient Redeemer (p) ? Is it, like *the Faith of the*
 “ *Syrophenician Woman*, not only Self-abasing, and
 “ Christ-exalting, but likewise so importunate for
 “ his Blessings as to take no Denial (q) ? Unclean as
 “ my Nature is, and filled with corrupt Propensities,
 “ does my Faith derive *Virtue from Christ*, to heal
 “ the most inveterate Diseases of my Soul (r) ? Does
 “ it *purify my Heart* (s), and implant there every
 “ divine Principle and holy Disposition ? Does it, as
 “ *the Substance of Things hoped for*, and *the Evidence*
 “ *of Things not seen*, enable me to overcome a smil-
 “ ing, or a frowning *World* (t) ? Worthy of its Hea-
 “ venly Extraction, does it *work by Love* (u), and
 “ make me zealous and faithful, disinterested and
 “ indefatigable, in serving my God and Saviour,
 “ my Fellow-Creatures, and especially *them who are*
 “ *of the Household of Faith* ? Whatever my religious
 “ Attainments may seem, am I still so solicitous to
 “ *abide in Christ*, that I may bring forth much Fruit,
 “ deeply sensible that *without Christ*, like a Branch
 “ broken off from the Root, I can do Nothing (w) ;
 “ Therefore, *forgetting those Things which are behind*,
 “ *and reaching forth unto those Things which are be-*
 “ *fore*, do I press toward the Mark, for the Prize of
 “ *the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus* (x) ? Am I
 “ *rejoicing in every Service or Suffering*, by which I
 “ am made more like *Jesus*, and more ready to
 “ meet him, *when his Glory shall be revealed* ? And
 “ *when I have done all those Things which are com-*
 “ *manded*, do I really esteem myself an unprofitable

“ Ser-

(p) Mat. viii. 8, 9.

(r) Mark v. 34.

(t) 1 John v. 4.

(w) John xv. 5.

(q) Mat. xv. 22—27.

(s) Acts xv. 9.

(u) Gal. v. 6.

(x) Phil. iii. 13, 14.

“ *Servant* (y); infinitely obliged to the Mercy of
 “ God in Christ Jesus my Lord for my present Ac-
 “ ceptance, and future Reward? *Search me, O God,*
 “ *and know my Heart; try me, and know my Thoughts,*
 “ and help me to see what my *Character* is, that I
 “ may know whether *I am in Christ* or not.

“ And if, through Grace, there be any Reason
 “ for me to hope, that I am possessed, though in a
 “ small Degree, of the *real Character*, will not that
 “ include in it a proportionable Claim to the distin-
 “ guishing Happiness of the true Christian? Am I
 “ not *made accepted in the beloved Jesus* (z)? Is not
 “ mine the *Blessedness of the Man to whom the Lord will*
 “ *not impute Sin* (a)? May I not with appropriating
 “ Confidence, look upon the holy and glorious Ma-
 “ jesty of Heaven and Earth, as *having reconciled me*
 “ *to himself by Jesus Christ* (b)? May I not con-
 “ clude, that the *Son of God*, unworthy as I am,
 “ *loved me, and gave himself for me* (c)? And that the
 “ *Spirit of God does itself bear Witness*, in some
 “ Degree, *with my Spirit, that I am the Child of God*
 “ (d)? What then should prevent me from apply-
 “ ing to myself his *exceeding great and precious Pro-*
 “ *misses*, with all the unconceivable and inestimable
 “ Blessings contained in them? *Whether the World,*
 “ *or Life, or Death, or Things present, or Things to*
 “ *come*, may I not say, they are all mine, because
 “ *Christ is mine, and I am his* (e)? Are not *Saints*
 “ on Earth, and *Saints in Heaven Fellow-Citizens*
 “ *with me of the new Jerusalem, and Fellow-Mem-*
 “ *bers of the Household of God* (f)? Are not Holy
 “ Angels the *ministring Spirits, sent forth to minister*
 “ *for me, as one of the Heirs of Salvation* (g)? Am
 “ I not *begotten, according to the abundant Mercy of*
 “ the

(y) Luke xvii. 10.

(a) Rom. iv. 8.

(c) Gal. ii. 20.

(e) 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

(g) Heb. i. 14.

(z) Epes. i. 6.

(b) 2 Cor. v. 18.

(d) Rom. viii. 16.

(f) Ephes. ii. 19.

“ the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto a
 “ lively Hope, of an Inheritance incorruptible, and un-
 “ defiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven
 “ for me (h)? And is not all this Felicity placed for
 “ me on the firmest Basis, even that of an everlasting
 “ Covenant, ordered in all Things and sure (i)?
 “ Is this the intimate Connection between the true
 “ Christian’s Character and Happiness? Is this the
 “ just and comprehensive Import of each, though
 “ but feebly described? It is impossible, O my Soul!
 “ to ask thyself any Question so interesting, so im-
 “ portant, as this, *Am I in Christ?*”

Secondly, We are to prove, that *any Man* may know whether he has an Interest in *Christ* or not.

The Arguments for this Purpose are such, as every serious Mind will acknowledge to be as intelligible, and convincing, as the Inquiry itself is important. It is only to consider,—the Manner in which the Divine Oracles direct us to attain this Knowledge; —the evident Tendency of Scripture-Promises to produce it; —the peculiar Concern it has with the Offices and Characters of the Holy Spirit, as a Reprover and Comforter; —and the Experience of Multitudes by whom it has been actually attained.

1. That *any Man* may know whether he has an Interest in *Christ*, or not, appears, “ from the
 “ Manner in which the divine Oracles direct
 “ us to attain this Knowledge.”

There is no plainer Direction, how to know whether we have a Personal Interest in *Christ* or not, than that which our Text introduces. We are taught to consider our *new Creation* as an undoubted Evidence of our Interest in *Christ*. And that an Evidence of so much Importance might not be misapprehended

(h) 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

(i) 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

prehended, we are told, what we are to understand by our *new Creation*, in the Words which immediately follow: *Old Things are past away; behold all Things are become new.* Let any Man try all Things in the Temper of his Mind, as well as in the Conduct of his Life, whether they be *old* or *new*; that is, whether they be as foolish and sinful, as corrupt and vicious as ever, and therefore *old*; or remarkably and universally changed into wise and holy, pure and heavenly, and therefore *new*. By following this Part of the divine Counsel, any Man may in some Measure discern, what Answer belongs to the Grand Inquiry, *Am I in Christ*, or not?

Another Direction, of equal Importance, but recommended in this Epistle with great Earnestness, is, *examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates (k)?* Can any two Characters be more opposite than, either, to have in us the Temper of *Jesus Christ*; or, be so destitute of it, and averse to it, as to be Reprobates, like Silver that will not stand the Touchstone? Is any Duty more apparently necessary than to examine, which of the opposite Characters is our own? And if this Duty is performed, what can hinder our obtaining some Degree of Self-Knowledge, as the certain Consequence of such Self-Examination?

The same Apostle directs the *Galatians* how to judge of their spiritual State, by pointing out to them the different Fruits, which would certainly be produced in their Temper and Conduct, in some Proportion to the Prevalence of *Fleshly* or *Spiritual* Principles in their Hearts. And because none but true Christians can experience the universal Prevalence of *Spiritual* Principles, over those that are *Fleshly*, he therefore concludes, for the Satisfaction of all true Christians, and for the Conviction of all such as have
only

only the Name of Christians, *they that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts* (l).

Another *Apostle*, having exhorted Christians to cultivate every Grace and Virtue belonging to those that are *Partakers of a divine Nature*, infers that by this Means their *Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and consequently of their own Interest in him, would greatly increase: Whereas, by neglecting to cultivate every Grace and Virtue, they would certainly reduce themselves to a State of great spiritual *Blindness* and *Impotence*. He then resumes the Exhortation, and urges it with redoubled Force, *wherefore the rather, Brethren, give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure* (m). They could not but know, that they were already called to an *outward Profession of Christianity*; and therefore the least Part of the *Apostle's* Meaning must be, that by the diligent Cultivation of every Grace and Virtue, which constitutes a divine Nature, they might certainly arrive at some satisfactory Evidence of their own Personal Interest in *Christ*.

It seems to have been one leading Design of the *Apostle John*, in writing his first Epistle, to help his Fellow Christians to discern their own spiritual state; that they themselves might have the Joy, and that Religion might have the Credit, which such a comfortable Discovery would naturally occasion. *These Things*, says he, *write we unto you, that your Joy may be full.—And hereby we do know, that we know him, if we keep his Commandments.—But who so keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected; hereby know we, that we are in him.—We know, that we have passed from Death unto Life, because we love the Brethren.—And he that keepeth his Commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him; and hereby we know, that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.—These Things have I written unto you, that believe on the Name of the Son of God; that ye may know, that*

B 2

(l) Gal. v. 17—24.

(m) 2 Pet. i. 4—10.

ye have eternal Life; and that ye may believe on the Name of the Son of God (n). By comparing such Passages as these, in John's Epistle, with what we have in his Gospel, we have good Reason to infer, that our blessed Lord also intended to instruct his Disciples, how to discern their own Personal Interest in himself; since he so frequently assures them, that their Obedience to his Commandments would be an undoubted Evidence of their Love to him, and consequently of their Interest in him. *If ye love me, keep my Commandments. — He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. — He that loveth me not, keepeth not my Sayings* (o).

These are a few, indeed very few, of the many Instances in which the holy Scriptures direct us how to know whether we have a Personal Interest in *Christ*, or not. And shall all these stand for Nothing? Dreadful as the Thought is, there is no avoiding it, if the grand Inquiry, *am I in Christ*, or not, will not admit of a determinate Answer.

2. It may also be argued, that “ the Promises
“ of Scripture have an evident Tendency to
“ help any Man to know whether he has an
“ Interest in *Christ*, or not.

So numerous are the Promises, and so perfectly suitable is any one of them to illustrate the Force of our Argument, that to be curious in selecting would be altogether needless. That Declaration, *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved* (p), though of a general and comprehensive Import, may nevertheless be properly applied as the firm Basis of Consolation, or Self-Condernnation to any particular Soul. That the *true Christian* may derive some chearful Hope from hence, concerning his own Salvation, he takes this Promise in its intimate Connection with
the

(n) 1 John i. 4. ii. 3, 5. iii. 14, 24. v. 13,
(o) John xiv. 15, 21, 24. (p) Mark xvi. 16.

the Character to which it is annexed, and reasons in some such Manner as this; "I am not only baptized in the Name of *Christ*, but I hope I have true Faith in him. I find in myself (adored be rich Grace) a deep Sense of my own Unworthiness, high Esteem for *Christ*, ardent Love to him, Hatred of all Sin for his Sake, and full Purpose of Heart to spend all I am and have in his Service. I tremble at the Thought of sharing in the present Character and final Condemnation of Unbelievers. I am often crying, *Lord, I believe, help me against my Unbelief* (q). *Lord, increase my Faith* (r). I hope, therefore, it is not Presumption in me to say, *I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and, according to his Promise, *I shall be saved*." On the other Hand, how can the mere nominal Christian avoid seasonable Conviction and Self-Condemnation, if he will but allow himself to inquire, whether the Baptism he has received, and the Faith which he therefore professeth, are producing in him such Fruits as deep Humility and Self-Abasement before God; sincere Love to *Christ*, Hatred of all Sin for *Christ's* Sake, and Resolutions by divine Help for new and holy Obedience? Will not his Conscience be obliged to testify against him, that none of these Fruits of saving Faith are found in him, that therefore the awful Remainder of our Lord's Declaration too plainly belongs to him, *he that believeth not shall be damned*?

In like Manner, the true Christian may take any Promise, of a more particular Kind, and more distinguishing Nature, and may apply to himself the Comfort resulting from it, if, through Grace he can discern in himself the peculiar Characteristic, to which the Promise is made. Does the Christian perceive himself reduced to such a Sensibility of his own Meanness, Dependence and Guilt, as to be *poor in Spirit*? He may, with a Confidence that is perfectly consistent with the deepest Humility, pronounce him-

B 3

self

(q) Mark ix. 24.

(r) Luke xvii. 5.

self *blest*, for the Kingdom of Heaven is his own (s).—Doth he mourn for Sin, more than for all his worldly Sorrows and Disappointments? He may assure himself, that *Blessedness* is inseparably connected with such Mourning, for in due Time he shall be comforted with those *Consolations of God*, which are neither few nor small (t).—Has divine Grace so altered his Temper, that, from being haughty and passionate, he is become habitually meek and lowly? He is therefore intitled to the Promise, that *he shall inherit the Earth*, with a special *Blessing* from Heaven, upon all his earthly Enjoyments and Interests (u).—Doth he feel in himself such prevailing Appetites of Soul as *Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*? *Blessed is he*, for in the compleatest Sense *he shall be filled* (w).—Is he merciful in all his Temper and Conduct towards them that are appointed to share in his Pity and Bounty? *Blessed is he*, for *he shall obtain Mercy*, from a merciful God and Saviour.—Is it his constant Labour, and fervent Prayer, to be *pure in Heart*; and his real Grief, to have any impure Thought or Affection enter there? Then *blest is he*, for *he shall see*, and completely, and eternally enjoy, a God of unspotted Purity and Perfection (x).

But if the *Nominal Christian* thoroughly tries himself by each of these Characteristics, he will find that instead of spiritual *Poverty*, his Mind is intoxicated with an Apprehension of his own Worthiness and Self-Sufficiency: Instead of Mourning for Sin, he will perceive, that his is the *Sorrow of the World*, which *worketh Death*: Instead of *Christian Meekness*, that he has either the Ease and Indolence of a Natural Temper, or is more openly or secretly indulging the Excesses of Wrath and Revenge, of Envy and Malice: Instead of *hungering and thirsting after Righteousness*, that his most solicitous Inquiries have manifestly been, *what shall I eat or drink, or wherewithall shall I be clothed?*

(s) Mat. v. 3. (t) v. 4. (u) v. 5. (w) v. 6.

(x) v. 7, 8.

cloathed? Instead of the *Merciful Temper*, that his *tendereſt Mercies have been Cruelty*, if not to the Bodies, at least to the Souls of those around him: And instead of *Purity of Heart*, he cannot avoid this Conſciouſneſs, that his Heart has entertained unclean Thoughts and Affections, nor was ever diſpleaſed with their coming-in, or their Stay there. Thus the farther he goes in his Self-Examination, the more apparently the Promiſes ſpeak a *Curſe* to him, rather than a *Bleſſing*, becauſe he is altogether deſtitute of the peculiar Characteriſtics to which the Promiſes are made.

In this Manner every Promiſe, whether of a more general, or a more particular Kind and Nature, has a moſt manifeſt Tendency to produce the Satisfaction, ſo much deſired by the *true Chriſtian* concerning his Intereſt in *Chriſt*; and alſo the Self-Condemnation which is equally neceſſary for the *Nominal Chriſtian*. But if the One is not this Way to be attained, neither is the Other. And if this was the Caſe, it might well be aſked, to what End has God given his People ſo many great and precious Promiſes? Is it their Deſign to diſtribute Bleſſings promiſcuouſly? Or rather like the Cloud in the Wilderneſs, is not their bright Side towards *Iſrael*, at the ſame Time that they ſpread Darkneſs before the *Egyptians*? Certainly, where they meet not with the *Heirs of Promiſe*, there they are turned into dreadful Curſes. God himſelf formed the Earth, he made it, he hath eſtabliſhed it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited. Neither hath he ſpoke his Promiſes in vain. Nor ſhall his People in vain ſeek their peculiar Support and Comfort from them. There is Nothing the Bleſſed God more reſents, than with Lies to make the Heart of the Righteous ſad, whom he hath not made ſad; and to ſtrengthen the Hands of the Wicked, that he ſhould not return from his wicked Way, by promiſing him Life (y). Is not the Spirit of God, both the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Promiſe?—Thus, from the evident Tendency of

B 4

Scrip-

(y) Ezek. xiii. 22.

Scripture-Promises, we are naturally led farther to argue,

3. That *any Man* may know whether he has an Interest in *Christ*, or not, “ because this Knowledge has such a peculiar Concern with the Character and Offices of the *Holy Spirit* both as a Reprover and a Comforter.”

Our blessed Lord expressly told his Disciples, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: Even the Spirit of Truth, whom the World cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you* (z). This he said, partly, to comfort them in the mournful Expectation of his being shortly separated from them; and partly, to encourage and animate them to manifest their Love to him by keeping his Commandments, to which he had just before been exhorting them. And what he promises *shall abide with them for ever*, cannot justly be confined to their own Persons; but must be interpreted as extending to all his obedient Disciples in all Ages. Accordingly the Apostle Paul tells the Saints at *Ephesus*, after that ye believed in *Christ*, ye were sealed with that *Holy Spirit of Promise* (a). And to the *Romans* the same Apostle says, ye have not received the Spirit of Bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father*. The Spirit itself beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. And if Children then Heirs; Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with *Christ* (b). He had a little before given them this, as his own Experience, the Love of God is shed abroad in our Hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (c). And afterward, that all of them might happily experience the same, he earnestly prays, *Now the*

(z) John xiv. 16, 17.

(b) Rom viii. 15—17.

(a) Ephes. i. 13.

(c) Rom. v. 5.

the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in Believing, that ye may abound in Hope, through the Power of the Holy Ghost (d). In the Beginning of the Chapter to which the Text belongs, he resolves all his delightful Views of approaching Immortality, into the comforting Influences of the Holy Spirit. *We know*, says he, *that if our earthly House of this Tabernacle were dissolved, we have a Building of God, an House not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens. Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same Thing, is God, who also hath given unto us the Earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident; willing rather to be absent from the Body, and to be present with the Lord* (e). And to shew that the Holy Spirit was given to others, for the same happy Purposes, he not only reminds his Converts at Ephesus, that the Spirit with which they were sealed, was the Earnest of their Inheritance, untill the Redemption of the purchased Possession; but he also solemnly warns them, not to grieve the holy Spirit of God, whereby they were sealed unto the Day of Redemption (f).

It should also be observed, that, as Conviction of Sin always goes before divine Consolation, for this Reason our Blessed Lord expressly declares, concerning the Comforter, whom he promises to send, that *when He is come, he will reprove the World of Sin* (g). But in vain does the Holy Spirit sustain such Offices, if in Consequence of his convincing Power, Sinners may not as clearly know that they have not yet an Interest in *Christ*, as Saints be enabled by his comforting Influences to conclude that their Interest in *Christ* is well grounded.

On the whole, as we reasoned concerning the evident Tendency of Scripture-Promises, so we must in the present Case. If neither *real* nor *nominal Christians* can attain sufficient Evidence of their Interest in *Christ*, or their Want of it, then *Christ* has promised

B 5

this

(d) Rom. xv. 13.

(e) 1 Cor. v. 1, 5, 6, 8.

(f) Ephes. i. 14. iv. 30.

(g) John xvi. 8.

this divine Reprover and Comforter in vain; and in vain does an Apostle talk of the Consolations of the Spirit, as experienced, either by himself, or others. Were we to consider, "what Hand the Spirit of God has in this Work, assisting us in the Knowledge of ourselves, and in Order to an Assurance of our good State; it is certain," says a pious and judicious Divine, "he indited and formed a Rule by which we must examine: He is the Author of those gracious Habits and Acts, in which our Conformity to the Rule consists: He helps us in the Exercise of Grace: He sometimes, no doubt, shines in upon the Mind, enlightens, and, as it were comments upon his own Work, makes it discerned and understood: He may sometimes assist in making the Conclusion; embolden the Christian to determine in Favour of himself, which his great Modesty, Humility, and Timorousness made him shy of doing. Nor will I deny but he may sometimes, *in an immediate authoritative Manner*, interpose and decide the Question, that has long been depending in the Mind, in Favour of the Believer. I assert Nothing here, neither will I deny this is ever the Case. His more ordinary Method is to *witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God*. But he may possibly, *on Special Occasions*, that require it, witness to them, without much of their Concurrence in the Work: As when the more melancholy Christian, that dare scarce entertain a good Thought of himself, or any Thing he doth, has been long poring upon himself, and is still bewildered, involved in Darkness and Fears, the Divine Spirit may, at such a Time, through a special Dispensation of Grace and Favour, come in to his Assistance; speak Peace, pronounce and make a Decision in his Favour. But this we are not to promise ourselves, nor expect; but wait for Evidence in the ordinary Way.*" Once more,

4. We

* *Bennet's Christian Oratory*, Part I. Chap. II. Sect. XI,
3d Edition, Page 572, 573.

4. We may surely and comfortably argue from
 “ the Experience of Multitudes, who have
 “ obtained for themselves a satisfactory Evi-
 “ dence of their Interest in *Christ*.”

With what appropriating Confidence does our Apostle declare his own Interest in the Love of *Christ*, when he says, *who loved me, and gave himself for me* (h) ? How peaceful is the Reflection he makes on all his past Engagements to *Christ* ? *I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that Day* (i). And, because he saw *that Day* approaching, how is he transported with the Prospect, and even anticipates the Triumph ? *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing* (k). Glorious and well-conducted Triumph ! He takes Care to shew, that such joyful Prospects beyond the Grave were far from being peculiar to himself. It is most unreasonable to imagine he would put such a *Stumbling-Block in the Way* of his Fellow-Christians, as must naturally arise from his expressing such Satisfaction concerning an Assurance of his own Personal Interest in *Christ*, if none could attain it but himself, or a few of his distinguished Rank. Wisely does he make it the Characteristic, not of Apostles, but of Christians, to *love the last appearing of Christ*. And therefore to all true Christians is the Exhortation addressed by another Apostle, *to be looking for, and hastening unto, the Coming of the Day of God* (l), as to them an Event, not of Terror, but Delight; which will fulfill their Hopes, and complete their Joy; and to which they should tend, with such ardent Desires, and strong Emotions of Soul, as long

B 6

absent

(h) Gal. ii. 20. (i) 1 Tim. i. 12. (k)—iv. 7, 8.

(l) 2 Pet. iii. 12.

absent Friends do to a pleasing Interview. Nor were such Exhortations given in vain, since it appears by a Testimony not to be disputed, that Multitudes of common Christians *took joyfully the Spoiling of their Goods, knowing in themselves that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring Substance* (m). Not only Martyrs and Confessors; but innumerable others, whose Faith was never brought to the *fiery Tryal*, have nevertheless lived and died with satisfactory Evidence of their own Personal Interest in *Christ*. "Nor do I apprehend," says the excellent Writer just now referred to, "Knowledge of our State, (call it *Affurance* if you please) so uncommon and extraordinary a Thing as some are apt to imagine; understand by *Affurance* a satisfactory Evidence of the Thing, such as excludes all reasonable Doubts, and disquieting Fears of the contrary; though it may be, not all transient Suspicions and Jealousies. Such an *Affurance* and Certainty Multitudes have attained, and enjoy the Comfort of; and indeed it is of so high Importance, that it is a Wonder any thoughtful Christian, that believes an Eternity, can be easy one Week or Day without it*."—Is it wonderful that any thoughtful Christian should be easy one Week or Day, without the satisfactory Evidence of his Personal Interest in *Christ*? Does Scripture and Experience abundantly prove, that this Satisfaction is attainable? What then shall we say, or think of Multitudes, who live and die, without ever attaining it? Therefore in Order to open a more distinct View, to all *nominal Christians*, of their unjust Claims to an Interest in *Christ*; and to all *true Christians*, of their very different Attainments in the divine Life, we should proceed,

Thirdly, To point out some of the Reasons, why many Persons never know whether they have an Interest in *Christ* or not; but this we shall do in the next Discourse.

S E R M O N

(m) Heb. x. 34.

* *Benuet*, ib. page 568, 569.



S E R M O N II.

T H E G R A N D I N Q U I R Y, &c.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 17. first Part.

Therefore if any Man be in Christ —

I HAVE read of “ a certain Prince’s Ser-
 vant, whose Fidelity and Diligence
 “ were so pleasing to his Master, that he
 “ promised to give him whatever he would
 “ ask. It happened the Servant fell sick,
 “ and was near Death. In his Extremity he earnest-
 “ ly requested a Visit from his Prince, who being
 “ come to his Bed Side, asked, what he desired of
 “ him? The Servant begged that he might not die,
 “ but live *some Years longer*. The Prince told him
 “ he must ask something else, for that was not in his
 “ Power. The Servant then begs to live *one Year*,

“ OR

“ or *one Month*, and at last if it was but *one Day*.
 “ The Prince continued to tell him, that what he
 “ asked was quite out of his Power to grant, and that
 “ he must ask Money, or Preferment, or Physic, or
 “ other Things that were in his Power. But the
 “ Servant replied, that he needed neither Money,
 “ nor Preferment, nor Physic, for none of these could
 “ prolong his Life *one Day*; and therefore, since he
 “ could not prolong his Life, he begged of him the
 “ Assurance of his Salvation, that, if he must die, he
 “ might die in Peace and with Assurance to be saved.
 “ This Demand very much afflicted the Prince, who
 “ told him, that his Salvation depended upon the
 “ Grace of God, and consequently was not in his
 “ Power to promise, much less to give. The disap-
 “ pointed Servant, turning from his Prince to the
 “ Wall, cried out, in great Distress, *O Wretch that*
 “ *I am! Have I spent all my Life in serving a Mas-*
 “ *ter, that is not able to assist me in my greatest Need;*
 “ *not so much as to give me one Hour's Life? I will*
 “ *no longer serve a Master so impotent.* Upon this he
 “ solemnly vowed to God, *if he would restore him to*
 “ *Health, he would serve God only, and mind the Con-*
 “ *cerns of his Soul, and give himself up to a Lord,*
 “ *who was able to give him eternal Life.* It pleased
 “ God to restore him to Health, and for some Years
 “ he lived a holy Life, and at last died comforta-
 “ bly.”—Let this Story teach us, that *to whom we*
yield ourselves Servants to obey, his Servants we are to
whom we obey; whether of Sin unto Death; or of O-
bedience, unto Righteousness (n). Therefore let not any
 of us stay, ’till a Death-Bed convince us of our Need
 of serving Christ, and securing an Interest in him.
 Rather let each of us now be saying, in all the Vig-
 our of Health, *Am I serving Christ? Am I interested*
in him? To assist us in a Concern of such infinite
Importance, we have

First, Explained the grand Inquiry, what it is for
any Man to be in Christ: and,

Secondly,

(n) Rom. vi, 16,

Secondly, Have proved, that *any Man* may know whether he has an Interest in *Christ*, or not ; by Arguments drawn from the Manner in which the divine Oracles direct us to attain this Knowledge—the evident Tendency of Scripture-Promises to produce it—the peculiar Concern it has with the Characters and Offices of the Holy Spirit, as a Reprover and Comforter—and the Experience of Multitudes by whom it has been actually attained. We are now,

Thirdly, To point out some of the Reasons, why many Persons never know whether they have an Interest in *Christ* or not.

A very imperfect Acquaintance with the Christian World will enable us to observe, that this is owing to one or other of the following Causes ; either,—gross Ignorance of the Truths of the Gospel ; or,—total Neglect of eternal Concerns ; or,—the cherishing some criminal Passion ; or,—a Recourse to false Evidences ; or,—unwarily prescribing Limits to the Operations of the Spirit of God ; or,—not applying divine Promises ; or,—not coming to the Lord's Table. *These Causes* are each of them of a *Moral Nature*, and therefore are easily to be distinguished from *others*, which are either *Natural* or *Supernatural* ; such as *Melancholy*, the *Buffetings of Satan*, and *divine Desertions*. Concerning these *last*, it should be carefully observed, that they certainly are the *great Afflictions* of those that are exercised with them ; but are by no Means to be esteemed their *Guilt*. And even where these *last* are blended with the *former*, as is not unusual, they tend in Proportion to their Degree of Influence, to diminish, rather than aggravate the *Guilt* arising from *Moral Causes*. And consequently, if there be any here, whose Want of satisfactory Evidence of their Interest in *Christ* is merely owing to a *melancholy Constitution*, or to *Satan's Buffetings*, or to *divine Desertions*, they may assure themselves

selves that the following Particulars are not designed to charge them with the least *Guilt*.

1. There are many in the Christian World, whose Want of knowing whether they have an Interest in *Christ*, or not, may be ascribed to their "gross Ignorance of the Truths of the Gospel."

That Ignorance is the Source of unnumbered and most fatal Mischiefs to the Souls of Men is past doubt. Therefore the Lord complains, *my People are destroyed for Lack of Knowledge* (o). For the same Reason the Gospel is sent to the Nations, *to open their Eyes and to turn them from Darkness to Light* (p). But nothing can more exalt our Ideas of the Importance of Knowledge, than to hear our blessed Lord pleading with his Father, in Behalf of his Disciples, *this is Life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent* (q). But though Knowledge is so necessary to constitute the Christian's Character, and be his sure Guide in the Way to eternal Life; yet alas! what Ignorance of the most important Truths of the Gospel is there in the Christian World? There are Multitudes of *nominal* Christians that never obtain any distinct Conceptions,—of the Sinfulness of Sin;—the Misery of an unpardoned State;—the Worth of a Saviour;—or, the Nature and Necessity of Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord *Jesus Christ*. Unhappy Souls! They are baptized; but live, and die, without knowing, without inquiring, to what valuable End their Baptism serves! They go through a Circle of religious Services, on which might properly be written, *To the unknown God* (r). They hope all is well with them; but their Hope is centered in themselves, in their own Worthiness, their good Meanings, and Performances, but

(o) Hof. iv. 6.

(q) John xvii. 3.

(p) Acts xxvi. 18.

(r) Acts xvii. 23.

but not in *Christ*; and consequently it is an unscriptural Hope, utterly insufficient to be the *Rest* and *Repose* of an immortal *Soul*. *The Bed* it shorter than that a *Man* can stretch himself on it, and the *Covering* narrower than that he can wrap himself in it (s). Whilst they are ignorantly cherishing their false Hope, it astonishes them to be told, that a *Personal Interest* in *Christ* is necessary to *Salvation*, and may be certainly known; and, according to their Custom of speaking Evil of the Things that they understand not (t), they are not afraid to pronounce this a Thing impossible. Whilst they flatter themselves, that they are rich, and increased with Goods, and have Need of Nothing to render their spiritual State better; they know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (u). Such is the Christianity of Multitudes! Awful State and Condition! Their Ignorance of the Truths of the Gospel renders them utterly incapable of giving a determinate Answer to the grand Inquiry, *Am I in Christ*, or not?

2. "A total Neglect of eternal Concerns," is another obvious Reason, why Multitudes never know whether they have an Interest in *Christ*, or not.

There is no doubt but gross Ignorance is frequently the Cause of this Negligence. But, alas! where Knowledge itself abounds, this Neglect of eternal Concerns is too often most lamentably prevalent. Many are the professing Christians, who excell in every natural and acquired Endowment of Mind; who are blessed with all the Advantages of Genius and Education; and to whose Conception and Expression the great Truths of the Gospel are plain and easy. But, with all this speculative Knowledge, and distinguished Furniture for religious Dispute, what lamentable Proofs are they daily giving, that eternal Concerns

(s) *Isai.* xxviii. 20.

(t) *2 Pet.* ii. 12.

(u) *Rev.* iii. 17.

Concerns are the farthest from their serious Thought and Care? How incessantly are they making Provision for the Flesh, to fulfill the Lusts thereof (w)? Their God is their Belly, their Glory is in their Shame, they mind earthly Things (x). These are the many that perpetually say, who will shew us any Good (y)? The God of this World hath so blinded their Minds (z), and hardened their Hearts, that whilst they profess to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent; yet in Works they deny both the Father and the Son, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good Work reprobate (a). That a Man cannot be profited, if he should gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul (b), is what they approve in Speculation: But view their Practice, and all eternal Things are Trifles with them, whilst the Things of Time and Sense are infinitely important. How can such Christians as these discover their Interest in Christ, when it is impossible they should have it, so long as they continue such? How much more likely are they, to die with a Lye in their right Hand (c)? And, when it is too late, have the Veil taken from their Eyes, their Hopes vanish away for ever, and the Saviour whom they slighted, pronounce their dreadful Doom, *I tell you, I know you not whence ye are, depart from me all ye Workers of Iniquity* (d)?

3. Others are prevented from certainly knowing whether they have an Interest in *Chri*, or not, by “ cherishing some criminal Passion.”

Such Christians there are, who are neither greatly ignorant of the Truths of the Gospel, nor totally negligent of eternal Concerns: They have so much Knowledge and Zeal as render their religious Profession reputable: And, perhaps, they are possessed of some low Degree of real Piety. But, whilst such look with

(w) Rom. xiii. 14.

(x) Phil. iii. 19.

(y) Psalm iv. 6.

(z) 2 Cor. iv. 4.

(a) Titus i. 16.

(b) Mat. xvi. 26.

(c) Isai. xlv. 20.

(d) Luke xiii. 27.

with Abhorrence upon all the more open and aggravated Sins of Omission and Commission, they either indulge to anxious *Cares for the Morrow*; or to inordinate Desires after worldly Enjoyments, and sensual Gratifications; or they are often falling into the Excess of Anger, and other irregular and disorderly Affections; or their Devotion is suffered to grow cold and formal, though they cannot forget its stated Returns; or they are expressing their *Conformity to a degenerate Age and World* (e), beyond the just Limits of a *holy Conversation*, and *circumspect Walking*. It is almost impossible to mention all the Symptoms of a *little Faith* (f); or point out every Step by which true Christians may *leave their first Love* (g). But, wherever the divine Life is in this feeble languishing State, do not wonder if the *Comfort* of it be lost with its *Vigour*, and the *Evidences of Grace* be rendered doubtful and obscure amidst so many *Blots and Blemishes*. *If our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God* (h). *If therefore our Hearts condemn us* for cherishing what is apparently criminal, what hath the Appearance of being evil, or what we cannot but suspect to be so, *our Confidence towards God* will totter and fail, and our Evidence of an Interest in *Christ*, will be proportionably defective.

4. There are some serious Christians, who hinder their own satisfactory View of an Interest in *Christ* by "a Recourse to false Evidences."

It is well known that the Generality of Christless Sinners, so far as they attempt to form any Judgment of their own spiritual State, usually have Recourse to false Evidences; and therefore *receive in themselves that Recompense of their Error which is meet* (i). Both the *grossly ignorant*; and the *totally negligent*; are prone to fix their false Hopes of an Interest in *Christ* on Evidences

(e) Rom. xii. 2.

(f) Mat. viii. 26.

(g) Rev. ii. 4.

(h) 1 John iii. 21.

(i) Rom. i. 27.

Evidences that are equally false; such as,—their Christian Name;—their Baptism;—their partaking of the Lord's Supper;—their speculative Knowledge, and other spiritual Gifts;—their Zeal for a peculiar Form of Worship, or Scheme of Doctrine;—their decent and constant Attendance upon religious Duties;—their being descended from pious Ancestors;—their good Education;—their Freedom from open Immoralities;—or their having had some transient Convictions of Conscience, with Resolutions for, and some Progress in, the Reformation of their Lives. No serious Christian can be supposed to be in much Danger of deceiving himself, by a Recourse to Evidences so manifestly false as these are. If such a one hinders his own satisfactory View of his Interest in *Christ*, by applying to Evidences that may be denominated false, it is natural to suppose, that the Fraud is of a more refined Nature, and of a less dangerous Tendency.

Perhaps serious Christians are suspecting they have no real Interest in *Christ*, “because they are not “perfectly holy.” In this Case they do not duly consider, nor clearly discern, the wide Difference between their *allowing no Sin*, and their being *sinless*. They vainly expect, their Conflicts with Corruptions and Temptations shall cease, before they get to *Heaven*. They forget, that Sanctification *here* is but *in Part*, and not in *Perfection*; Though more perfect in some, than in others, yet imperfect in all: That it is not a Work to be performed all at once, but *gradually*; and therefore the *Path of the Just* is compared to the *shining Light*, that *shineth more and more unto the perfect Day* (k). They do not distinguish between *Sanctification*, and *Justification*; that though both *begin* with *Faith in Christ*, yet the *latter* does not admit of different Degrees, like the *former*: That though Believers are sanctified *gradually*; yet they are justified *immediately*: That Justification is complete

in

(k) Prov. iv. 18.

in them all; at the same Time that they *differ like one Star from another* in the Degrees of their Sanctification (l). Or, in other Words, they should remember, that being *washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God* (m), they need not doubt the Acceptance of their *sincere though imperfect* Obedience.

Sometimes serious Christians are ready to conclude they have no Interest in *Christ*, "because their Prayers are not immediately answered." But did not such a Saint as *David*, cry, *how long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever* (n)? Did not such an Apostle as *Paul* beseech the Lord thrice (o), without obtaining the Removal of his particular Complaint? Is it not our *Infirmity*, if we expect more than God has promised? Or if we doubt of his Goodness and Mercy, his Truth and Faithfulness, merely because we have not the Answer of our Prayers in a *Way, or Time*, that is not good for us?

Again, the Fears of serious Christians, concerning their Interest in *Christ*, are often excited by observing, that "their Affections are not at all Times equally lively and spiritual." They do not sufficiently consider the great Impropriety and Inconvenience of judging of their spiritual State by the changeable Posture of their Affections. None ever excelled *David* for a devotional Temper, yet we find him complaining, *my Soul cleaveth to the Dust*, and consequently praying, *Lord, quicken thou me according to thy Word* (p). Though the *Affections* are ever so variable, yet if the *Bent and Inclination of the Will* is unalterably fixed, for God and *Christ*, for Heaven and Holiness, there is a sufficient Evidence of an Interest in *Christ*.

And perhaps there is not any one false Evidence of an Interest in *Christ* more frequently made Use of, by serious

(l) 1 Cor. xv. 41.

(n) Psalm xiii. 1.

(p) Psalm cxix. 25.

(m) 1 Cor. vi. 11.

(o) 2 Cor. xii. 8.

serious Persons, to their great Prejudice, than “comparing themselves with others, without considering the great Difference of Circumstances.” Because they fall short of the Piety and Zeal of Prophets, or Apostles; or find themselves very unequal to some eminent Saints, whose Lives they have read; whose Educations, and Spheres of Action were widely different from their own; and of whose Infirmities and Failings, little or Nothing is said, that ought to have been said, therefore they are apt to overlook and undervalue whatever God has done for their own Souls, and even to conclude themselves utterly destitute of a divine Life and Temper. It was to prevent the fatal Influence, which this Reasoning might have upon Christians, when called to pray with, and for, their afflicted Brethren, that the Apostle *James* reminds such of the imperfect Character of the Prophet *Elijah*. *Elias*, says he, *was a Man subject to like Passions as we are*, yet *his Prayers* were crowned with remarkable Success (q). He would therefore have them to infer, that, if they compared the Success of their own Prayers with the greater Success of *Elijah's*, they should also be so just to themselves as to compare their Infirmities with his; that whilst his Prayers discourage them, his Infirmities may give them suitable Relief.

By a Recourse to such false Evidences as these, and many more that might be mentioned, truly pious Souls are often interrupting their own Peace, even to such a Degree, as to render the most plain and obvious, the most rational and scriptural Solutions utterly ineffectual to restore and confirm it.

5. Other serious Christians darken their Views of an Interest in *Christ*, by “unwarily prescribing Limits to the Operations of the Spirit of God.”

Their

(q) James v. 17, 18.

Their incautious and very mistaken Manner of reasoning is to this Effect; "Alas! we have no satisfactory Evidence of our Interest in *Christ*, for—our serious Impressions did not begin soon enough in Life;—we are not able, like others, to determine the particular Time, Occasions, and Means, of our Conversion;—had the Work of true Conversion been ever wrought in us, our Sorrow for Sin would have been deeper;—our Fears of Hell would have been more alarming;—a Sense of the Wrath of God would have filled us with greater Horror and Agony of Spirit;—our Apprehensions of his Love in *Jesus Christ* would have been more tender and melting;—our Conflicts with Corruptions and Temptations would have been sharper, more various, and of longer Continuance;—and no Doubt we should have equalled others in divine Graces and Consolations. It is too apparent, that our Christianity is only a Name: We have the *Form of Godliness*, without the *Power*; and our Disease will scarcely admit of a Remedy." Thus the Operations of a divine Spirit, through the malicious Suggestions of the Spirit of Darkness, are misrepresented and disguised. Alas! instead of a Heart enlarged with Thankfulness, in the Contemplation of such harmonious and beautiful Variety, so visible in the gracious Operations of the Spirit of God; the deceived Soul is swallowed up in Murmuring and Discontent, and tormented with Anxiety and Despair. How effectually would such Operations be vindicated, and the Comfort of the sanctified Soul be speedily restored, if the Apostle's Reasoning was well attended to; *There are Diversities of Gifts, but the same Spirit: and there are Diversities of Operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all* (r). It is the same divine Agent, which adapts his Manner of Operation to the Difference of natural Tempers, Education, and a Variety of other Circumstances belonging to different

different Persons. To awaken some notorious Sinners, he seems to ride in the Whirlwind. To impress others, of a different Character, he comes *softly*, and *with a still Voice*. One is brought to *Christ* in the Anguish of over-whelming Sorrows. Another is *overcome with Love*, and therefore soon bursts forth into Songs of Joy and Gratitude. Souls, recovered from gross Ignorance, and a long Course of open Prophaneity and Impiety, may determine the Place, the Time, and the Manner of their Conversion: While those, of a better Education, and a more regular Conduct, are perhaps led to *Christ*, they know not how; only upon calm Reflection they can say, *whereas we were once blind, now we see*. But,

6. It is to be feared the Perplexity of most serious *Christians*, concerning their Interest in *Christ*, is chiefly owing to "their not making
" a more particular Application of divine
" Promises."

The Promises are Heaven's kind, unchangeable Engagements to communicate Happiness to truly penitent and believing Sinners. They are indited by *the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter (s)*, who is therefore stiled *the holy Spirit of Promise (t)*. They are confirmed by *the Oath of God, that by two such immutable Things*, his Promise and his Oath, *in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong Consolation (u)*. They are sealed with the *Blood of Christ (w)*, have such an immediate Reference to him, and are so compleatly accomplished in him, that therefore *all the Promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen (x)*. They are the Foundation of our Faith and Hope, and the Charter of our spiritual Privileges. They are Bills drawn upon the Bank of Heaven,

(s) John xv. 26. (t) Eph. i. 13. (u) Heb. vi. 17, 18.
(w) Luke xxii. 20. (x) 2 Cor. i. 20.

Heaven, which God, by all the Perfections of his Nature, and all the Ingagements of his Covenant, is obliged to honour. They are a Treasure, *exceeding great and precious* (y), beyond all Estimation.

We may properly be said to apply divine Promises to ourselves, when we value them as our best Treasure; when we venture our All upon them; when we are anxious to know our personal Interest in them; when we give them the best Place in our Meditations; and when we often plead them in Prayer, especially under all our Burthens of conscious Guilt and Pollution, and in Seasons of Affliction and Temptation. This is the Way to honour God, whose Promises they are, and the Redeemer, by whose Blood they are sealed; and consequently it is the most effectual Way to secure Peace to our own Souls. Why else doth the Prophet say, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect Peace, whose Mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee* (z)? Was not this the Way in which Abraham's Faith discovered both its excellent Nature and happy Tendency? *He staggered not at the Promise of God, through Unbelief; but was strong in Faith, giving Glory to God* (a).

There are indeed many humble pious Souls, who are very unjustly condemning themselves, for their neglect of divine Promises, and their Want of Faith in them. But the real Cause of their Complaint seems to be, not their Want of due Regard to divine Promises, but their unhappily mistaking the Nature of Faith, and supposing there can be no true *Faith* without *Assurance*. To believe in *Christ* for Salvation, is, “such a Persuasion that he is the Saviour of Sinners, and such a Desire and Expectation of the Blessings which he has in his Gospel promised to his People, as engages the Soul to fix its Dependence upon him, and subject itself to him in all the Ways of holy Obedience.” And certainly there are many who thus believe, tho’ they are not fully persuaded

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(y) 2 Pet. i. 4. (z) Isai. xxvi. 3. (a) Rom. iv. 20.

suaded of their personal Interest in *Christ* *. Many have the *Truth of Grace*, tho' for a Time they want the *Comfort of it*. Such are apt to be full of Fears about their own Sincerity, and rashly conclude they have no Faith, only because they cannot believe themselves to be sincere. They should consider, that to doubt of their own Sincerity, is not *Unbelief*: It is rather the *Godly Fear* to which the Apostle exhorts: *Work out your own Salvation*, says he, *with Fear and Trembling* (b). And likewise, *fear, lest a Promise being left us of entering into his Rest, any of you should seem to come short of it* (c). So that while humble pious Souls only doubt their own Sincerity, they are not distrusting God, or *Christ*, but themselves; and it cannot be their Sin to distrust themselves. While they only doubt, whether they have the Qualifications and Characteristics to which the Promises are made, they are not neglecting the Promises, but are really applying them. Amidst all their Self-Condemnations, I would ask them; do not you value the Promises as your Treasure? Is not your Dependence upon them, more than upon an Arm of Flesh? Would not you give all the World to know your personal Interest in them? Is not one Promise, or another, continually in your Thoughts? And are not your Prayers full of earnest Pleadings, that divine Promises may be accomplished in your own present and future Blessedness? Be convinced, then, that it is a great and dangerous Mistake to make *Faith* to consist in *Assurance*; or to conclude, that you are neglecting divine Promises, when you are only doubting your own Interest in them. This Mistake of yours might have been mentioned under the Head of "having Recourse to false Evidences;" But it is never unseasonable to administer Comfort to pious Mourners, and the Case is so common as to deserve this particular Notice.

On the contrary, there are too many *Christians* who greatly sin, by neglecting divine Promises, and not ap-

* See the Appendix. (b) Phil. ii, 12. (c) Heb. iv, 1.

applying them as they ought. They are more prone to distrust God and *Christ*, than themselves. They lose their Sense of the Preciousness of the Promises, and are valuing something else as their Treasure. They are honouring, with their Confidence, the Word of mortal Man, more than the Word of the living God. They are slothful and negligent about their Interest in *Christ*, but zealous in securing the Interests of Time and Sense. Divine Promises are, to them, like Things forgotten, and out of Mind. And to plead them earnestly, is too little consistent with the cold and formal Temper of their Prayers. No wonder the Faith of such is *little* and *staggering*, ever prone to call in Question the Truth and Faithfulness of God, and the Power and Grace of *Christ*. They affront God and *Christ*, by making light of divine Promises; and the Indignity is justly resented, and plainly punished, by his *sending Leanness into their Souls* (d). We are once more to observe,

7. There are a few real Christians, who continue in painful Doubt concerning their Interest in *Christ*, "for want of coming to his Table."

The holy Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, is too often abused and profaned by promiscuous Admissions, and too often prostituted to Purposes, that have not the least Connection with the Improvement of a divine Life and Temper. Whilst *unworthy* Communicants are too numerous, there are a few serious Christians, who are kept at a Distance from the sacred Feast, only by their own mistaken Apprehensions of their great *Unfitness* for it. Happy would it be, if the Consciences of the *former* were deeply convinced of the Guilt they are contracting, and their Minds were well instructed how to escape the Condemnation to which they are exposed! And happy for the *latter*, if their Fears of eating and drinking

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sacra-

(d) Psalm cvi, 15.

sacramental Bread and Wine *unworthily*, were accompanied with the equally rational Fears of disobeying their Lord's positive Command! To come with *Fears of Unworthiness*, is the Posture of humble, and consequently of *worthy Communicants*. But by such *Fears* to be driven from the Discharge of an important Duty, is *really* committing Sin, to avoid the *Appearance* of Sin.

Ye *fearful* Christians! Are you anxious to discern your Interest in *Christ*? Make haste to obey his Command. He has expressly commanded, *do this in Remembrance of Me*. Hope not to obtain Comfort out of the Way of Obedience. First obey *Christ*, and then see, if such a Master can long neglect those that are supremely concerned to please him. Certainly this is a more direct and justifiable Expedient, for scattering your Fears concerning your Interest in *Christ*, than to resolve you will stay away from the Lord's Table, till you can first clearly discern your Interest in him. Solid Peace is only to be found in the Way of Obedience.

The Request of a dying Friend has always been thought sacred. Such was our Lord's Appointment concerning his Supper. It was delivered to his Disciples, with such immediate and solemn Reference to his Death, *the same Night in which he was betrayed* (e), that it may most properly be called his dying Request. —See what peculiar Notice the blessed God took of a certain Family amongst the *Jews*, and what a special Blessing he pronounced upon their Posterity, only because they had long and punctually performed the Request of a dying Father. The Case was this, *Jonadab the Son of Rechab charged his Sons to drink no Wine all their Days, they, their Wives, their Sons, nor their Daughters; nor to build Houses for them to dwell in; neither to have Vineyards, nor Fields, nor Seed*. And because the Sons of this *Jonadab* absolutely refused to drink Wine, which the Prophet *Jeremiah*, at the

Com-

(e) 1 Cor. xi, 23.

Commandment of the Lord, set before them, to try them; therefore in the midst of the desolating Judgments then denounced against Judah, and all the Inhabitants of Jerusalem, *the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel says, Jonadab the Son of Rechab shall not want a Man to stand before me for ever* (f).—No longer let the Disciples of Jesus live in Disobedience to his dying Command. Let even their pious Fears determine them to wait upon him in his appointed Way; till they receive his Blessing, and rejoice in his Love.—It now remains to conclude with some Considerations, more immediately designed,

Fourthly, To urge all those to make the grand Inquiry, *am I in Christ* or not, who have hitherto neglected it.

“ Blessed Saviour! Teach Men to ask after Thee.
 “ Fix their Attention to eternal Things. Excite in
 “ them earnest Inquiries after their own Salvation.
 “ Lord, help them to consider. And, *with thy Finger*, write upon their Hearts such Considerations
 “ as these;”—*Am I in Christ*, is the most necessary Inquiry we can possibly make;—it is of universal Concern;—there is no Inquiry in the World of so advantageous a Nature?—there is nothing which Men are more tempted by their worst Enemies to neglect;—or more earnestly intreated by their best Friends to regard.

1. Consider the absolute Necessity of your inquiring after an Interest in *Christ*.

You know the World is full of Inquiries. Every Man flatters himself that his own, whatever that be, is the most necessary. Indeed, such are the mistaken Apprehensions which Men are forming of the Objects around them, that every perishing Enjoyment of

C 3

Time

(f) Jeremiah xxxv.

Time and Sense is pursued, as if it were absolutely necessary to true Happiness. Thousands are raising their Thoughts and Wishes no higher than prosperous Trades, large Estates, well-furnished Tables, elegant Dress, numerous Attendants, or the Breath of popular Applause. Others are more reasonably panting after the Joys of Friendship, or the valuable Improvements of Arts and Sciences. But what are any, or all of these, compared with the Care of the Soul, the *one Thing needful* (g)? I may be rich, or great, admired for my Stores of Learning, or confided in as the Soul of Friendship; but, without an Interest in *Christ*, my Damnation is certain and unavoidable. *For what is a Man profited, if he should gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul? Or what shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul* (h)? How are Mortals imposing a Cheat upon themselves which is big with infinite Mischief? Fancying this or that Inquiry the most necessary, till the Flames of Hell convince them of their fatal Delusion?

Men and Brethren, for God's Sake, open your Eyes, and see written, as with the Sun-Beams, that *all Things are Vanity, and Vexation of Spirit* abstracted from an Interest in *Christ*. And what have you to plead for neglecting that, which is most necessary? Is a Moment's Delay, when all is at Stake, to be vindicated at the Bar of Reason? Will you continue to delay, for successive Months, or Years, as if *Necessity* itself had lost all its Power of Sollicitation? Dare you hope to succeed at last, like the *penitent Thief*? Your hope is vain: For *He*, without any Delay, sought an Interest in *Christ*, as soon as he came to the Knowledge of him. *O, that Men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter End* (i)!

2. Consider, that the grand Inquiry, *Am I in Christ*, or not, is of *universal Concern*.

The

(g) Luke x. 42. (h) Mat. xvi. 26. (i) Deut. xxxii. 29.

The Apostle seems solicitous to have this Consideration taken special Notice of, when he says in the Text, *if any Man be in Christ*. An Interest in *Christ* is equally necessary for every Man. Every Man has a precious immortal Soul, that must be saved, or damned for ever. But *there is no other Name under Heaven given among Men*, besides that of Jesus Christ, *whereby we must be saved* (k). Therefore to secure an Interest in him, is equally the Concern of *learned and unlearned, of rich and poor, of Princes and Beggars, of Preachers and Hearers, of old and young, of sick and well, of the living and dying*. It is appointed unto Men, of every Language, Rank, and Character, *once to die, but after this the Judgment* (l) If any Individual Person, in the whole human Race, can be exempted from Death and Judgment, then only may he be excused from the grand Inquiry, *am I in Christ, or not?*

3. Consider, that there is no Inquiry in the World of so *Advantageous a Nature* as this, *am I in Christ, or not?*

Godliness is profitable unto all Things, having Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come (m). To seek an Interest in *Christ*, is the very first Step towards Godliness, and consequently an Introduction to the greatest Profit attainable by a rational Being. Ask the experienced Travellers in the Ways of Godliness, what Advantage they have found? They will all of them assure you, that *her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace* (n). They will love to recount their various and invaluable Blessings; such as, the Pardon of their Sins, the Favour and Friendship of God, a new and divine Nature, Peace of Conscience, Joy in the Holy Ghost, together with their *lively Hopes* of eternal Glory. To

C 4

all

(k) Acts iv. 12.

(l) Heb. ix. 27.

(m) 1 Tim. iv. 8.

(n) Prov. iii. 17.

all their wondrous Tale they will add, that *the half is not told you*; and will easily demonstrate to you, that the least Blessing of Godliness is infinitely better than all the Profits and Pleasures of Sin.

But don't imagine, Sirs, that because such Blessings are invaluable, therefore they are difficult to obtain. Never conclude them beyond your Reach, if you do but seek them *while it is called to-Day*. Therefore, *ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened* (o). Can your Hearts desire to make a profitable Return, on Terms more easy and reasonable? And is it not the greatest Infatuation, to look upon such inconceivable Gain with Indifference? But,

4. Consider, that there is nothing you are more tempted by your worst Enemies to neglect, than the grand Inquiry, *am I in Christ*, or not?

It cannot be difficult to determine who are your worst Enemies. Does it not shew the most inveterate and deadly Enmity to your highest Interest and Happiness, to be continually practising all imaginable Arts, for blinding your Reason, stupifying your Consciences, debasing your immortal Natures, and subjecting them to Passion and Appetite, in Order that your Souls may be absolutely enslaved, nor have any Leisure or Inclination to exert so much as a Thought towards rescuing themselves from the complicated Chains?

Such, Sinners, are the unwearied Efforts of an Enemy you are cherishing in your own Bosoms, even your corrupt and inordinate *Self-Love*. Is not this inbred Traytor perpetually suggesting to you such Things as these? "There is no need to be over-thoughtful about an Interest in *Christ*. He will
" save

" save you without so much ado. Now is your Time
 " for Business and Pleasure. You have a Thousand
 " Things to mind *at present*. An Interest in *Christ*
 " may be thought of, and inquired after, at *any Time*.
 " It will be Pity to lose your agreeable Companions,
 " your innocent Mirth, and indeed the very best Sea-
 " son you will ever have for Self-Enjoyment. When
 " you will, you may return to the dull Work of
 " your Closets. There is a *more convenient Time* to
 " serve *Christ*: Whereas to mind your Souls *now*,
 " will make you melancholy *too soon*." Who but *an*
Enemy will sow such Tares as these (p)? What else,
 but *an evil Heart of Unbelief*, will thus contrive how
 to depart, at the remotest Distance, from the living
 God (q)? Believe it, Sinners, every Man is tempted,
 when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed
 (r).

And is not Satan, that restless implacable Enemy to
 Souls, as a roaring Lion, walking about, seeking whom
 he may devour (s)? Are not Multitudes of Souls taken
 Captive by him at his Will (t)?

When has the World ever approved itself a Friend
 to Men's eternal Interests? What Forms of Temptation
 does it not wear? There is the Lust of the Flesh,
 the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life (u); all of
 them in the closest Union, labouring incessantly to
 extinguish every serious Thought of *Christ* and Salva-
 tion; and without the least Compassion pushing Thou-
 sands of immortal Souls into eternal Ruin.

Sinners, pity yourselves. Learn Self-Preservation
 from the Number, Strength, and Policy of your En-
 mies. Were your Eyes open to see your Danger;
 what horrid Cruelty your Enemies are concealing un-
 der a specious Veil of Friendship; and how united,
 and enraged, they are, against the Name and Interest
 of *Jesus*; you would never give Sleep to your Eyes, nor
 Slumber to your Eye-Lids, till in Defiance of the
 World,

C 5

(p) Mat. xiii. 25.

(q) Heb. iii. 12.

(r) James i. 14.

(s) 1 Pet. v. 8.

(t) 2 Tim. ii. 26.

(u) 1 John ii. 16.

World, the Flesh, and the Devil, your whole Heart was filled with anxious Inquiries after an Interest in Christ.

5. Be intreated once more to consider, that there is Nothing you are more *earnestly solicited by your best Friends to regard*, than the grand Inquiry, *Am I in Christ, or not?*

You cannot doubt the friendly Intentions of the *Blessed God*, in the *Bounties of his Providence*, in the *Gift of his Son*, in the *Promise of his Spirit*, and the kind *Invitations and Encouragements of his Word*. You are persuaded, that your *faithful Ministers*, your *pious Relatives*, and many other *Godly Persons*, are seeking your best Interest; and would not, knowingly, contribute to your eternal Misery, no, not for Ten Thousand Worlds. The Friendship of your own *Consciences* you never called in Question. And are not *all these* to be numbered amongst your *best Friends*? Would not your Indignation rise against any that bus suspected your Interest in such Friendship?

And pray, Sinners, what would these *best Friends* have you to do? Is it not their earnest and sincere, their unanimous and repeated Request, that you would seriously inquire after an Interest in *Christ*? Though you have often turned a *deaf Ear* to all their Sollicitations, have they therefore *ceased*? When they have found your *Hearts hardened*, and your *Wills bent upon your own Destruction*, did they then leave you to perish? Can you calmly sit down, and recollect the Months and Years, through which *these Friends* have been following you with their Kindness, and trying every tender and faithful Method to engage you to love your own Souls?—Can you do this—and not condemn yourselves for the highest Ingratitude to the *Gift of Friends*; as well as for the most stupid Neglect of your own Interest? Are not you the very Persons, whom the *Father of Mercies* desires to number with
his

his Children, and embrace as his Favourites?—For whom a Redeemer has shed his Blood, and is now pleading *at the right Hand of the Majesty on high*?—And, with whom, the *holy Spirit is striving* from Day to Day? What affectionate Calls, what melting Expostulations, has the *Gospel* been addressing to your Ears, and trying to fix on your Hearts? Has not *Conscience* sometimes given you inward Pain and taught you how *faithful are the Wounds of a Friend* (w)? When at any Time the Joys of Sense have failed, and you have been *holden in Cords of Affliction*, could you avoid concluding, that the *Providence* was designed to teach you a most important Lesson? Could you doubt the Meaning of your *pious Relatives*, when they have often admonished you, and even wept over you?—Now let these *best Friends* prevail. Act the reasonable Part, and concur with *them* in desiring your own Happiness. Think—how much *Heaven* itself will consist in having these *Friends eternally pleased with you*. Think—if *Hell* itself can have any Thing more tormenting than the *total Loss of such Friendship*. For God's Sake, set your *best Friends* over against your *worst Enemies*; compare the different Spirit, with which they are animated; and the quite different Ends, to which their Endeavours with you are directed: And then *resolve*, and make the *Resolution*, with the greatest Sincerity, and most entire Dependence on divine Grace; “Henceforward, our *worst Enemies* “shall be disappointed; our *best Friends* shall be “served and pleased; our *own eternal Salvation* shall “be secured; and therefore, the grand Question, *Am “I in Christ*, shall, without farther Delay, be seriously asked; nor will we rest in any Thing short “of a satisfactory Answer.”

But this Address cannot be properly concluded without taking some Notice of those, whom Charity obliges us to place in the Rank of sincere Christians; who have nevertheless been neglecting the grand In-

quity, though not totally, yet in such a Degree, as greatly to enfeeble their Graces, and diminish their divine Comforts. Dear Fellow-Christians! Is it not a most desirable Thing, to have the Spirit of God *open the Eyes of your Understanding, that ye may more distinctly know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the Saints* (x)? Is it not your indispensable Duty and highest Interest, to *grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (y)? And how can such important Attainments be reasonably expected without the *diligent Use of all appointed Means*? Therefore suffer the Word of Exhortation, and *give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure* (z). Pant after clearer Evidences of your Interest in *Christ*. See *Eternity* at the Door. Think how soon the *Judge will appear*, to try, and determine your State for ever. Judge yourselves now, that you may not then be *condemned with the World* (a). You have need of great *Searchings of Heart*, lest your want of discerning your Interest in *Christ* should be owing to one, or other, of the Errors just now pointed at: Either to your remaining Ignorance of the Truths of the Gospel; or, to your lamentable Neglect of eternal Things; or, to your cherishing some criminal Passion; or, your making Use of false Evidences; or, unjustly limiting the Operations of the Spirit; or, not applying divine Promises; or, your not coming to the Table of the Lord; or (may it not be added) to your careless Attendance at that holy Table, and Forgetfulness of the Engagements so solemnly made there. *Examine yourselves, try and prove your own selves*. Fervently pray for divine Assistance. Intreat the Lord, *not to take his holy Spirit from you* (b). Beg that *the Spirit of Truth may take of the Things of Christ, and shew them unto you* (c). Join yourselves to *lively and experienced Christians*, and desire their Prayers and Coun-
sels.

(x) Ephes. i. 18.

(y) 2 Pet. iii. 18.

(z) 2 Pet. i. 10.

(a) 1 Cor. xi. 32.

(b) Psalm li. 11.

(c) John xvi. 13.

sels. Ask *them*, how their Evidences of an Interest in *Christ* were first discovered, and how the Clearness of them has since been maintained and increased. See, with peculiar Attention, how much *they value*, and how *afraid they are to lose*, their *divine Comforts*; and therefore with what Constancy they *watch and pray* lest they enter into *Temptation* (d); and how solicitous they are to *walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but as Wise, redeeming the Time, because the Days are evil* (e). If one of those *holy and happy Souls* may speak for the rest, this Advice cannot conclude in better Words than Mr. *Flavel's*; "I verily believe, (says that excellent Man) that the sweetest Hours Christians enjoy in this World are, when they retire into their Closets, and sit there concealed from all Eyes, but him that made them; looking now, into the Bible; then, into their own Hearts; and then, up to God; closely following the grand Debate about their Interest in *Christ*, till they have brought it to the happy desired Issue *."

(d) Mat. xxvi. 41.

(e) Ephes. v. 15, 16.

* Mr. *Flavel's* Cure of Mental Errors. 2d Appendix, page 407, 408,

THE E N D.



A P.

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A P P E N D I X.

 H E attentive Reader will observe the Account given of *Faith* in the last Sermon, [Page 65, 66] and will in some Measure see the great Importance of adhering to that Manner of stating it, as best calculated to promote a well-grounded and comfortable View of our Interest in *Christ*. More fully to convince him how important this is, I beg Leave to add the following Remarks.

The other and very different Ways of stating *Faith*, are chiefly these two; either as consisting in a mere *Assent to the Gospel as true*; or, in the *Assurance of our Personal Interest in Christ*. One sinks it *too low*; the other raises it *too high*. The former takes a *Part* for the *Whole*; the latter puts the *Effect* for the *Cause*. Both are *dangerous*, as they tend to perplex the Mind, and hinder it in its regular Advances towards Holiness and Comfort.

Concerning the *first* of these, it must be allowed, that, as Knowledge is the Foundation of Practice, therefore a mere *Assent to the Gospel as true*, an *Historical Faith*, or a *Persuasion that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of Sinners*, is of real Importance in *Christianity*. Without this *Assent*, as the first Step, there can be no coming at those other Things in which the Life of *Faith* consists; viz. an earnest *Desire and Expectation of*

the Blessings which Christ has promised in the Gospel, Dependence upon him, and Subjection to him. To these, this Assent ought to be wholly subservient; and from these, it should derive all its Value. Abstracted from these, what is it but a mere notional and speculative Thing? A Faith not saving, as it neither produces Peace in the Conscience, nor Purity in the Heart; A Sort of vague Knowledge, that is not interesting to us, because thereby the great Truths of the Gospel are not applied to their proper salutary Purposes, either for relieving a Mind oppressed with a Sense of Guilt, or for implanting in the Heart every Grace and Virtue? Assent, in this abstracted View of it, is the Knowledge which puffeth up; but Charity, or that Faith which worketh by Love, edifieth (a). As long as this Assent remaineth alone, it nameth the Name of Christ, but does not depart from Iniquity (b). It calls Christ, Lord, Lord, and does not the Things which he says (c). It wears a Form of Godliness but denies the Power thereof (d). It is the very same Faith the Apostle James is speaking of, when he observes, the Devils also believe and tremble (e). Too apparent are the Proofs which Multitudes in the Christian World now give, that their Faith rises no higher than this general Assent; and at best is no more than the Credit demanded from them to any authentic, but uninteresting, History. Awful are the Intimations which our Lord gives, that many will in the great Day be found to have had no other, nor better Faith than this, to whom he will then profess, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity (f).

The Popish World is, as it were, naturally formed to a Complacency in this very insufficient Kind of Faith, because it is so intimately connected with their Fundamental Doctrine of Merit, and with which it so effectually concurs in cherishing Pride, Self-Dependence

(a) 1 Cor. viii. 1. Gal. v. 6.

(c) Luke vi. 46.

(e) James ii. 19.

(b) 2 Tim. ii. 19.

(d) 2 Tim. iii. 5.

(f) Mat. vii. 22, 23.

pendence and Self-Righteousness, and in multiplying every lifeless Form of Devotion, or rather of Superstition. Hence it comes to pass, that the *Council of Trent*, that Standard of modern Popery, “anathematizes all those, who maintain such Doctrines as imply, that the certain Knowledge of a Personal Interest in Christ is attainable, except by a *special Revelation* (g).”

The *Protestant World* has, indeed, professedly rejected the Doctrine of *Merit*, and treated *Historical Faith* as only valuable, when it serves to beget and strengthen the nobler Ingredients of a *saving Faith*. And happy would it be, if all that call themselves *Protestants* would, in their *Practice*, adhere to such a rational and scriptural Profession! Happy indeed! to have Thousands around us alarmed with wholesome Terror, whom the most dangerous Insensibility has made easy and secure on the Brink of Ruin? whose *Faith*, it is greatly to be feared, is all *Assent*, and merely *Historical*, and who have too often been taught to esteem it to all Intents and Purposes *effectual*; so that *their Conscience* is, as it were, *seared with an hot Iron* (h).

As for the opposite Extreme of making *Faith* to consist in the *Assurance of our Personal Interest in Christ*; to what I have already said concerning its dangerous Tendency, in the last Sermon, I shall here add an Extract from the Writings of Dr. *Richard Sibbs*, who was Preacher to the *honourable Society of Gray's-Inn*, and Master of *Katherine-Hall* in *Cambridge*, and died 1635. This eminent Divine states a Query in these Words; “May not there be *Doubtings*, where there is true *Faith*? May not a true *Believer* be without *Assurance*?” And he gives the following Answer to it. “There be three Ranks of *Christians*;

“*First*, Some that are yet under the *Spirit of Bondage*, like little Children, and do all for *Fear*.

“*Secondly*,

(g) Vid Council. Trid. Sess. vi. Cap. 15 and 16.

(h) 1 Tim. iv. 2.

“ *Secondly*, Those that are under *the Spirit of Adoption*, and do many Things well; but yet are not altogether free from *Fear*. These are like those Children, that are moved with Reverence to obey their Parents, and yet find their Commands somewhat irksome unto them.

“ The *Third* are such as, by *the Love of God shed abroad in their Hearts by the Spirit of Adoption*, are carried with large Spirits to obey their Father; and are, herein, like unto those Children, that not only obey, but take a Delight in it, upon a Judgment that both Obedience, and the Thing wherein they obey is good.

“ This we ought to labour for. But we find many *Christians* in the second Rank. Many truly believe in *Christ*, by some Light let into their Hearts by *the Spirit of Adoption*, who are not yet fully assured of the Love of *Christ*.

“ There is the *Act of Faith*, and the *Fruit of Faith*. The *Act of Faith* is, to cast ourselves upon God’s Mercy in *Christ*: The *Fruit of Faith* is, in believing, to be assured of this, We must know, that *Faith* is one Thing, *Assurance* another. They may have Faith, and yet want a double Assurance; viz. first, Assurance of their Faith, being not able to judge at all Times of their own Act: Likewise Secondly, Assurance of their State in Grace, as in Time of Desertion and Temptation. A Soul, at such a Time, casts itself upon *Christ*, as knowing Comfort is there to be had, though he be not sure of it for himself. And this the Soul does out of Obedience, though not out of Feeling; as the poor Man in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe, help my Unbelief*. The Soul oftentimes, *out of the Deep, cries*; and, *in the dark, trusts in God*. And this is the bold Adventure of Faith; the first Object whereof is *Christ*, held-out in a Promise; and not Assurance; which springeth from the first Act, when it pleaseth God to shine upon the Soul, and

“ is

“ is a Reward of glorifying God’s Mercy in Christ
 “ by casting the Soul upon his Truth and Goodness.
 “ *Assurance* is God’s Seal; *Faith* is our Seal. When
 “ we set to our Seal, *by believing*; He sets to his Seal,
 “ *assuring us of our Condition*. We yield first the
 “ Assent and the Consent of Faith, and then God
 “ puts his Seal to the Contract. There must be a
 “ good Title, before a Confirmation; a Planting, be-
 “ fore a Rooting and Establishing; the Bargain be-
 “ fore the Earnest.
 “ Some would have *Faith* to be, an overpowering
 “ Light of the Soul, whereby they undoubtedly believe
 “ themselves to be Christ’s, and Christ to be their’s;
 “ which stumbleth many a weak, yet true Christian.
 “ For this is rather the Fruit of a strong Faith, than
 “ the Act of a weak Faith, which struggleth with
 “ Doubting, untill it hath gotten the upper Hand
 “ (i).”

It would be easy to fill a large Volume with Ex-
 tracts from the Writings of the most eminent Divines,
 that have lived in our Country since Dr. *Sibbs*, and who
 all of them speak the same Sentiments. But for fear
 of swelling this Appendix too much, it shall close
 with the Words of Dr. *Watts*. He is contemplating
 the Condition of the Saints as unknown in this World,
 and among other Things he observes, “ It seems
 “ proper there should be something of a Cloud up-
 “ on them, upon their own Account, because the pre-
 “ sent State of a Christian is a State of Trial. We
 “ are not to walk by Sight as the Saints above and
 “ Angels do; they know they are possessed of Life
 “ and Blessedness, for they see God himself near them,
 “ Christ in the Midst of them, and Glory all around
 “ them. Our Work is to live by Faith; and therefore
 “ God has not made either his Love to us, or his
 “ Grace in us, so obvious and apparent to ourselves,
 “ as that every Christian, even the weak and the un-
 “ watchful, should be fully assured of his Salvation.
 “ He

(i) Dr. *Sibbs*’s Fountain sealed. p. 209—213.

“ He has not appointed the Principle of Life within
 “ us, to sparkle in so divine a Manner, as to be al-
 “ ways self-evident to the best of Christians, much
 “ less to the Luke-warm and the Backslider. It is
 “ fit that it should not be too sensibly manifest, be-
 “ cause it is so sensibly imperfect; that we might
 “ *examine ourselves whether we are in the Faith, and*
 “ *prove ourselves, whether Christ, as a Principle of*
 “ *Life, dwell in us,* or no (k). While so many Snares
 “ and Sins and Dangers attend us, and mingle with
 “ our spiritual Life, there will be something of Dark-
 “ ness ready to rise and obscure it, that so we may
 “ maintain a holy Jealousy and Solitude about our
 “ own State, that we may search with Diligence to
 “ find whether we have a divine Life or no, and be
 “ called and urged often to look inwards.

“ This Degree of remaining Darkness, and the
 “ doubtful State of a slothful Christian, is sometimes
 “ of great use to spur him onward in his Race of
 “ Holiness, and quicken him to aspire after the high-
 “ est Measures of the spiritual Life; that when its
 “ Acts are more vigorous, it may shine with the
 “ brightest Evidence, and give the Soul of the Be-
 “ liever full Satisfaction and Joy. It serves also to
 “ awaken the drowsy Christian to keep a holy Watch
 “ over his Heart and Practice, lest Sin and Tempta-
 “ tion make a foul Inroad upon his divine Life,
 “ spread still a thicker Cloud over his best Hopes,
 “ and break the Peace of his Conscience. Though
 “ the Principle of Grace be not always self-evident,
 “ yet we are required *to give Diligence, to make and*
 “ *to keep it sure.* 2 Pet. i. 10 (l).”

(k) 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

(l) Watt's Posthumous Works. Remnants of Time. p. 297—299.

N. B. The following Hymns were written in a very
 different Form by a Divine of the last Age. It is
 hoped

hoped they will not be unacceptable to the pious Reader (notwithstanding the simplicity of the Language and Poetry) as the Alphabetical Manner of beginning each Line may serve to impress them on the Memory, and the Sentiments may not a little promote the practical Design of the preceding Sermons.



*The Christian's SELF-INJUNCTIONS, for
the Morning.*

- 1 **A**RISE betimes, and praise the Lord;
Be all Attention to his Word;
Call on his Name with fervent Prayer;
Deny myself; for Death prepare.
- 2 Each Moment piously improve;
For Friends, and Foes, breathe ardent Love;
Guard well my ever-roving Thoughts;
Hate and forsake my fav'rite Faults.
- 3 In Virtue's Dress adorn my Life;
Keep far from Pride, Lult, Passion, Strife;
Live still by Faith on *Jesus*' Name;
My Maker's Praise be all my Aim.
- 4 No Thoughts so much indulge, as those
Of Judgment, Heaven and endless Woes;
Prudence and Truth my Lips still guard;
Quell stand'rous Talk as soon as heard.
- 5 Rash Promises avoid with Care;
Speak gracious Words with pious Fear;
Take daily Food with Pray'r and Praise,
Use it for Strength in Heav'nly Ways.
- 6 Wise be my Intimates and few;
'Xactly pay to all their Due;
Yet lay up Store with frugal Care;
Zealous the Poor may largely share.

A P P E N D I X.

The Christian's SELF-EXAMINATION for the Evening.

- 1 **A** ROSE I soon to praise the Lord?
Bent was my Mind to search his Word?
Call'd I on him with fervent Breath?
Deny'd I Self? Thought I of Death?
- 2 Each passing Hour did I improve?
For Friends, and Foes, flam'd I with Love?
Guarded were all my roving Thoughts?
Have I forsook my fav'rite Faults?
- 3 In Virtue's Drefs form'd I my Life?
Kept I from Pride, Lust, Passion, Strife?
Liv'd I by Faith on *Jesus*' Name?
Made I my Maker's Praise my Aim?
- 4 No Thoughts did I so chuse, as those
Of future Judgment, Joys, and Woes?
Plac'd I before my Lips a Guard?
Quell'd I the stand'rous Talk I heard?
- 5 Rash Promises shun'd I with Care?
Speak I with Grace and pious Fear?
Took I my Food with Pray'r and Praise;
Us'd I my Strength in Heav'nly Ways?
- 6 Wise were my Intimates, and few?
'Xactly paid I all their Due?
Yet careful to increase my Store?
Zealous to feed and clothe the Poor?

T H E E N D.

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